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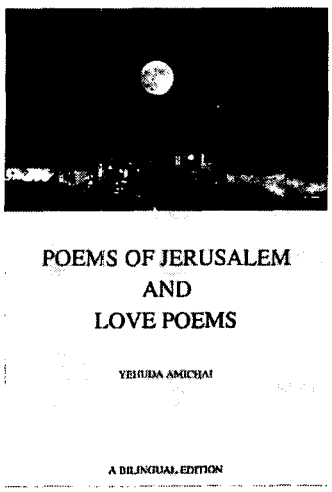


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dissent

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# Editor's Page

This is a time for argument. The world after communism, after the fall of the last of the great empires, doesn't conform to anyone's expectations. There are still pretenders, left and right, to ideological correctness. But no one that I know knows what ought to be done about the major post-imperial questions: transitional politics and economics (from what to what?), new/old nationalism, religious revival, civil war, internationalist intervention, mass immigration, multiculturalism. On all these issues, there is a wide range of opinion among our editors and writers, which we intend to represent in the magazine. We want *Dissent* to be the place where a new kind of leftist politics is hammered out, even if the hammering sometimes hurts.

So we will publish controversial pieces, like the Günter Grass articles on East Germany in previous issues and his report from Cuba in this one, arguing in both cases for a slowed (and locally organized) transition out of communism, critical of Western triumphalism. Or like Shlomo Avineri's account of Islamic "fundamentalism," which rejects Voltairian scorn for the sake of historical and sociological understanding. Or like Tom Nairn's piece on Bosnia: an account of nationalism more accepting (in my own view, more realistic) than many of our readers are likely to find acceptable. Let them respond in the next issue. We promise to keep the arguments lively and civil; we won't allow even metaphorical expulsions or excommunications.

Compared to Bosnia, U.S. politics looks pale indeed. We should be glad that the stakes are lower here. And yet a large question will be decided in the coming months: whether there is an American liberalism of sufficient strength and coherence to shape our future. We take up some of the critical problems of our own society in this issue, with articles on economic policy, immigration, violence, and constitutional reform (health care will be featured in the Winter issue). Most of our readers will be relieved to discover that none of our writers mentions the "politics of meaning." But we don't doubt the meaningfulness of the decisions soon to be made by the president and Congress. The quality of life of ordinary Americans, especially of poor, unemployed, uninsured, and unprotected Americans, hangs on the outcome. Even modest successes for the new administration will open the way for a more experimental politics, social ferment, democratic initiatives. Liberalism and the left rise (and fall) together. That is why, though we shall certainly be critical of many of President Clinton's policy proposals, we will not encourage an ultra-leftist rejection of the possibilities his victory opens up. Nothing better is likely to be available in American politics in the near future.

Why that is so, why Clinton is so weak and liberalism virtually invisible, is a subject that we need to explore in coming issues. In the academy, liberal political theory is undergoing a welcome revival. But in the country at large and in Washington, liberals look and sound like a fearful minority—and Clinton like a minority president, unsupported, as Harold Meyerson says in this issue, by any kind of political mobilization. High hopes (why not?) and low expectations seem the right response.

We carry in this issue a collection of memories and memorials for Irving Howe by his children and a large number of friends and comrades, from here and abroad. But we intend a larger memorial: the magazine itself and our continuing engagement with the problems of socialism and democracy. There will be changes, of course, as we go along, but *Dissent* will continue to be his magazine: committed to an enduring set of values; intense; argumentative; undogmatic; and, whenever necessary, dissident.

One small change is this page, which Mitchell Cohen and I will take turns writing. Here we will introduce the issue, worry about what it includes and doesn't include, and make promises for the future. The set of articles that we publish together in any single issue reflects, obviously, our sense of what is most important and most interesting for us (editors and writers) and for the readers we hope to reach. But it also reflects, more haphazardly, the uneven yield of articles delivered from articles promised. It is never exactly what we had in mind. Still, the buck stops here. On this page, we will take responsibility and explain our successes and failures.

—M.W. □



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Tom Nairn

# ALL BOSNIANS NOW?

*Grant to them the Fatherland of their desire,*
*and make them again citizens of Paradise*

Rebecca West, dedication to *Black Lamb & Grey Falcon: a Journey through Yugoslavia* (1940)

One interpretation of events in Bosnia-Herzegovina is that over recent weeks we have been receiving direct satellite images from Thomas Hobbes's "state of nature."[1] The accompanying commentary has been mainly outrage and lamentation, punctuated by demands that something be done, by some outside agency, to remove the continual fear and the danger of violent death—to restore what, in those conditions, people are no longer so shy about calling "civilization" or "Western standards."

This view was endorsed recently by Michael Ignatieff in a *New York Review of Books* article, "The Balkan Tragedy," where he depicts "the whole region . . . turned from a model of interethnic peace into a nightmare from the pages of Thomas Hobbes. . . . By 1990 post-Titoist Yugoslavia had become a Hobbesian world, a state of nature in which the means of violence were too widely distributed to afford anyone safety, especially those who found themselves a minority in the successor republics." (May 13th 1993)

From this perspective it tends to follow that whatever the state of nature discloses must be human nature in the raw, stripped of cultural accretions. Hence that nature is indeed an aggressive one, disposed to the war of all against all. But the aggression also has an uncomfortably collective or communal dimension to it. The war is of one gang against another, and "tribalism" has returned to being the favored term in this connection ("the tribal politics of Bosnia," as the *Economist* labeled it). But of course tribalism is easily extrapolated into the more modern categories of nationalism or chauvinism—and so into a conventional image of primitive, atavistic tendencies erupting through the veneer of civilization. Ethnic demons have resurfaced in a way that, unless the veneer is forcibly reimposed, menances the entire world with the Ethnic Abyss.

On the question of forcible reimposition, probably the most authoritative statement so far has come from George Kennan, a former U.S. ambassador to the USSR and Yugoslavia. Comparing today's Balkans to the crisis and wars of 1913, this veteran diplomat and author has argued (also in the *New York Review of Books,* July 15, 1993) that "there is no evidence that the ability of the Balkan peoples to interact peaceably with one another is any greater now than it was those eighty years ago . . . [hence] it will take outside mediation, and in all probability outside force, to devise a reasonable settlement and to bring the various parties to accept and observe it." Given the incapacity of these unfortunate people to interact in a civilized fashion, future restraints upon them will, regrettably, "have to be greater than those that are now normally applied in the international community."

Essentially the same liberal view surfaces in many different forms. We find it in one of the most outspoken American polemics of the past year, Robert Hughes's *Culture of Complaint: The Fraying of America*:

> People once used a dead metaphor—"Balkanization"—to evoke the splitting of a field into sects, groups, little nodes of power. Now, on the dismembered corpse of Yugoslavia, whose "cultural differences" (or, to put it plainly, archaic religious and racial lunacies) have been set free by the death of Communism, we see what that stale figure of speech once meant and now means again. A Hobbesian world: the war of all on all, locked in blood-feud and theocratic hatred. . . . What imperial rule, what Hapsburg tyranny or slothful dominion of Muscovite apparatchiks, would not be preferable to this?



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Yet ignorant radicals (he concludes) still "orate about separatism. . . . They cannot know what demons they are frivolously invoking. If they did, they would fall silent in shame."

Speaking as an ignorant radical, I can only suggest to Hughes that this overemphasis falls below the standard of his book's generally worthy polemic. "Balkanization" was never a dead metaphor. I can recall no time when it was not used against would-be "little nodes of power" with deadly effect, most often by authentically slothful metropolitans. The latter have always felt cultural differences to be aesthetically admirable, until they seek a political form. They then become archaic lunacies, explainable only in terms of atavism.

I suggest that it is this whole manner of argument that is stale, including its dubious identification of a war in Bosnia with the problems of American multiculturalism. Wherever "demons" are evoked one should be suspicious. Hysteria and scapegoats abound, the latter captained by capital "N" Nationalism and personified in the Great-Serb regime of Milosevic. In a week when the latest Bosnian atrocities were occurring alongside preparations for an impeccably democratic referendum in the newly independent Republic of Eritrea, I think that few who step back or think comparatively about the wider context would really pretend that such ethnic demonology represents a balanced or overall verdict on the post-1989 world.

It seems to me we need to look more directly and critically into the "Balkan tragedy," the heart of darkness itself. Is it really a return to the state of nature? Can it truly be said to disclose fearful truths of human nature, all those warnings about Old Adam the ethnic savage? Are we all Bosnians under the thin skin of civilization, unless multi-ethnic or non-ethnic restraints are kept firmly in place, and forcefully reimposed where they have lapsed?

## Relics of Empire

I don't believe it. What I want to do is suggest some elements of an alternative theory of what has happened in part of the former Yugoslavia. In this other perspective, human nature in the awesome Hobbesian sense has very little to do with it, and atavism nothing at all. There is no state of nature. Ethnic demons are undeniably present, but these have been conjured up almost entirely by modern motives. The old clothes should not so easily deceive us: nationalism has been turned homicidal by fears—uncomfortably rational fears—about the future, and not by ghosts inevitably resurgent from the European past.

All this has occurred in circumstances that, mercifully, were never characteristic of nationality struggles and are now very uncommon. The chief places in Europe where they have survived are along two ancient marchlands: the *vojna granica* or East-West military frontier (including a lot of Bosnia-Herzegovina), and the Settlement frontier of Northern Ireland.

In such areas, situations of what could be called ethnic palimpsest have survived—although in a sense "survived" is not, or not quite, the right term. "Palimpsest" usually means "a parchment that has been used twice or three times after the earlier writing has been erased," but where the previous entries are decipherable—hence a historical situation of intimate overlay or admixture, or a spatio-temporal mosaic. Actually such situations have been preserved for equally unusual reasons—deliberately maintained against the grain of most modern social and economic development. By "modern" I mean here not recent but postfeudal: development from the mid-eighteenth century up to the present day.

Ethnic palimpsests or mosaics do not constitute minority problems in the usual sense. At least, they do not do so naturally: making them fit the rules is itself a drastic exercise. In that phrase I quoted earlier from Ignatieff's article, he says that the Yugoslav communities concerned "found themselves a minority in the successor republics" and (by implication) have been rebelling against that fate. Would they had been so lucky. Their dilemma was much more difficult: it was a choice between what most could not help perceiving as *intolerable* minority status and (if they took to arms) enormously preferable prospects inside one or another majority.

But these prospects depended upon redrawing boundary lines. Hence—depending on the intimate geography of place—they involved a different and more damnable choice for one or more of the other communities locked into the palimpsest or jigsaw: the choice of moving, of relocating on the other side of one of the new frontiers. The sole other alternative would have been the one which Ignatieff goes on to indicate in summary style: "Interethnic accommodation depended on the existence of a multi-ethnic state." When the old communist one fell apart (therefore) such accommodation came to depend upon the rapid constitution of a successor—of a multi-ethnic democracy capable of governing a capitalist social order.

Now, such a solution was imaginable by intellec-



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tuals, and was indeed quite often imagined. It may even have been possible in circumstances different from those prevailing. But the fact seems to be that on the ground, among these patchwork populations stranded by the collapse of Yugoslavia, it was out of the question. After the long Communist dictatorship, the traditions or civic customs that might have led in that direction simply did not exist—or at least, nothing like strongly enough to furnish a mobilizing alternative to the ethnic one.

However, the main point is that it was not the overwhelming seduction or force of *ethnos* as such that drew Bosnia into chaos. There was another necessary condition: the absence of any other more civil and moderating route toward reconstruction—of a Yugoslav tradition sufficiently democratic, and sufficiently implanted in popular attitudes. It may be in that absence that the true failure of the Titoist regime can be read.

Such a democratic void was bound to have a peculiar impact in this region, given its history. Many commentators have noted that it is the oldest of European marchlands—its original boundary with "the Orient" of the Ottoman Sultanate and (before that) with Byzantium. I know that Slavs don't like being pinned down by this kind of consideration (in precisely the way Kennan does, above). They feel rightly that old prejudices about the Balkans will be reinforced by suggesting that they are somehow more helplessly governed by antique patterns than we, the more liberated folk west of the line. But without drawing any such conclusion (in fact it is rather a contrary one I hope to make) one may still think that history does have an unusual place in the circumstances of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

After all, this was border country indeed—not just a line on the map but a veritable march-world, a partition of civilizations. What it separated were not countries or nation-states but empires and faiths. Divergent eternities, as it were, both descended from world conquests, that had set themselves no bounds in either heaven or earth. When the eighteenth century brought what we now call the "Age of Nationalism"—a mere couple of centuries—their conflict had endured for true ages, so long that few of the inhabitants knew much of its origins or could even imagine its end.

Just over a century ago, two brothers, Alfred and James Evans, traveled on foot across this same terrain now so familiar through newsreels and recorded their impressions. Although the original function of the military frontier had passed away, they observed how much of its social order had remained—an odd, decayed pattern of plantation and extended-family settlements, at once garrison and buffer zone. It was something like Ulster, and also resembled the old Debateable Land of the western marches between Scotland and England, only much broader and about nine hundred miles long.

> We were anxious to catch a glimpse of that antique society [they wrote] . . . so long artificially preserved from change by the monarchy, before it dies away from the memory of man. For to cross the Military Frontier is to go back, not indeed into Feudal times . . . but to wander beyond the twilight of history, and take a lantern as it were into the night of time.[2]

They need not have worried so much about its dying away, since a "monarchy" (in a sense rather different from the one they had in mind) was due to survive until 1990. That is, one outside protectorate or another was due to continue, with a stake in conserving the ethno-religious mixture left behind by the old empires. Deriving from the past fluctuations of the border, Catholics, Orthodox Serbs and Greeks, and Muslims (or as they usually said, "Mahometans") lived in adjoining villages, or sometimes at different ends of the same villages or towns.

The "multi-ethnic state" such coexistence depended upon can also (less flatteringly) be described as a tolerable external force capable of arbitrating clashes of interest. The Hapsburgs on one side of the old divide and the Ottoman Sultanate on the other were sufficiently remote, conservative, and disinterested to hold the ring in that sense. They were faith-inclined, of course, but not ethnically or linguistically biased. Citizenship was a bad joke in both empires, but at least it was more or less the same bad joke for everybody, Croat, Serb, and Muslim alike. Everyone was a second-class subject. This would indeed be another way of putting the "problem" which is now being "solved" by population movement and slaughter: second-class subjecthood was also destined to endure until 1990.

## When Empire Dissolves

To their intense surprise, not unmixed with British indignation, the Evans brothers walked straight into a Bosnian war. By the time they reached Sarajevo much of the land was up in arms against its Muslim rulers. In reaction the Muslims of Lower Bosnia took the law into their own hands and counterattacked the Christians. "Such were the ferocious



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warriors whose acquaintance we made in Travnik," they comment sourly:

> Today they are streaming into Sarajevo: we met a party of them defiling through the street, and the leader of the gang, as he passed, glared savagely at us. . . . They are, from what we hear, mere organized brigands headed by irresponsible partisans, and at present are committing the wildest atrocities—cutting down women, children, and old men who come in their way, and burning the crops and homesteads of the peasants. That the defense of Bosnia should have fallen into the hands of such men is one of the most terrible features of the situation, and nothing can better show the abjectness of her present governors than that they have consented to accept the services of these bandits. . . . Thus in Bosnia the Christian outbreak has been opposed by a counter-revolution of Moslem fanaticism.

But at the same time the brothers knew how these troubles would probably be sorted out—by the arrival of outside forces with orders from Istanbul to impartially shoot down anyone misbehaving (including local Muslims). This was 1875—the beginning of over a century of more-or-less incessant warfare across the region. After the Balkan Wars would come the retreat of the Ottomans, two world wars, and then the Yugoslav revolution and civil war of 1943–45.

There was a lull during the inter-war period, true, under the Serbian Karageorge monarchy. But the effects of that were in a sense foreseen by these Nonconformist travelers of half a century earlier. The Croat and Catholic part of the population feared Serb domination as much as the Muslims—"They betrayed a lively repugnance to the Great Serbian idea in any shape," the Evanses observed—

> . . . seeing in Serbian unity the triumph of their Greek rivals, who form the large majority of the population of Bosnia, and who would at once become the ruling caste if Bosnia were united to Free Serbia, Montenegro and the other fragments of the old Serbian Empire. . . . Rather than see Bosnia in any form of *Serbian* state they would accept the continuance of Turkish rule (pp.182–4).

The cold war should really be added to the torture list. It is true that ethnic fratricide was stilled during the period, and that Tito's regime lessened the Serb hegemony over Yugoslavia as a whole. But it also diligently preserved the extraordinary patchwork of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Much of it remained (or was restored) even after the massacres and expulsions of the Croat Fascist state. The Jews and the Germans had left the frontier marches, under conditions most preferred not to remember. But its main national ingredients remained or in some places returned.

Subsequently this would be seen and advertised as proof of communism's success with ethnic issues: a civilized and socialist solution to the nationalist question, as demonstrated by the intimate daily coexistence of the Muslim and Christian communities. And today this verdict still tends to find a sort of validation among Western observers. "A model of interethnic peace" is Ignatieff's version of it, willfully destroyed (therefore) by selfish, inward- and backward-looking fanatics on all sides. The judgment has been echoed a thousand times. It then appears to follow that if only one deals with these blighters firmly enough (especially the Serbs), then interethnic amity can be recreated, and ordinary folk would fall back into their ancestral and accommodating ways.

But there is an alternative interpretation. The curse of this old frontier zone is that, though ravaged by so many wars and revolutions, it was never allowed to unscramble itself along what became the standard lines of European nation-state evolution. The direct impact of the wars upon Bosnia was dreadful, above all in the years from 1942 to 1944. The great eyewitness of this was Milovan Djilas, in his incomparable memoir *Wartime* (1977). Yet what one might call the normal results of such experiences—movement of populations, redefinition of boundaries, new national or subnational polities—never happened there in permanent form.

To obviate misunderstandings, it is important to say that calling this "normal" does not imply that it was wonderful. There is nothing marvelous about the fact that most border and minority problems have been sorted out in that basic, crude, and sometimes surgical fashion. I am simply pointing out that the fact has been a fact, which no doubt would not have occurred in the various ideal or better worlds that people have imagined, and still imagine. Unfortunately the real world was (and as we see, still is) rather different.

Instead of being sorted out, however deplorably, still another external force was imposed upon the Bosnian mixture: the second sultanate (as it were) of the Yugoslav League of Communists. The latter constructed an artificial polity, the regional federated state of Bosnia-Herzegovina. This was intended to be two things: a cushion in between the all too real



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countries of Croatia and Serbia (whose nationalisms had to be tied down), and an exhibition of progress undefiled by ethnic antagonisms—all the more important because of these vestiges of the first sultanate that endured there. It had to be progress without democracy (although this crucial fact was veiled in various ways, by general Marxist rhetoric as well as by the specially Yugoslav smokescreen of the self-management system). Democracy was too dangerous in Bosnia.

The population-mosaic of Bosnia was essential to Titoism, precisely because it indicated what one might call a postnationalist solution without democracy. South-Slav socialism had magically broken the rules of nation-state development. It had conjured up an interethnic way forward. The peculiar magic of self-management transcended all the old dilemmas and gave the State a permanent moral cudgel against the ethnic recidivism of Croats and Serbs. Once that recidivism had reemerged, of course, exactly the opposite became true. As Robert Hayden points out in one brilliant overview of the conflict:

> The continued peaceful coexistence of Serbs, Croats, and others in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Banija or Slavonija, for example) would have constituted living disproof of the Serbian and Croatian nationalist ideologies. Since the politicians who won in 1990 based their programmes on these ideologies, the communities whose existence would disprove them could not be permitted to exist.[3]

When the last protectorate crumbled away, the danger of ordinary democracy could no longer be averted. Democracy is people power. And in this region people are primarily communities, the democratic impulse is strong but also collective, ethnic rather than individual or abstract. And communism, by arrogating formal democracy to itself and blocking all other paths of growth, had in the end strengthened the very nationalism that it boasted of containing. The preexisting exemplar of ethnic harmony, the marvelous patchwork quilt of settlement upon settlement, faith side by side with its ancient foes, turned out also to be a bomb.

## Now We Have Democracy

The Evans brothers could detect no "surviving polish of an older civilization" among the "Bosniacs" (as they usually call them). "Among the Christians," they complained bitterly, "even of the highest social strata, the want of politeness and that ungenerous vice of mean spirits—ingratitude—are simply astounding." Yet there was another side to Bosnia that, in fairness, they also felt compelled to acknowledge:

> I should be guilty of passing a very shallow judgement on the sometimes too obtrusive familiarity of these people if I did not point out that it is but an unpleasant phase of what is really one of the most valuable qualities preserved by the Bosnian people in the days of bondage. It is part and parcel of a democratic habit of mind common to the whole Serbian, and indeed the whole South-Slavonic race. It is the representative in conversation of these primitive social relations which hold throughout all these lands within the common yard of the house-community and have survived alike the imported feudalism of the Middle Ages, and the Turkish conquest.

I thought of these travelers one day last year, when the Bosnian-Serb leader Radovan Karadzic was being interviewed by Jon Snow of London's *Channel 4 News*. Snow accused him in the usual lofty way of destroying the old tolerance with his nationalist antics. "Yes, yes," the interviewee snapped back, "it is quite true we used to live like that for a long time. But that was before democracy. Now we have democracy, Mr. Snow. People no longer have to live that way, we have free choice. Why do you wish us punished for that, Mr. Snow?"

No endorsement of Great-Serb expansionism is implied in the recognition that here, on this crucial point, Karadzic was quite right. After 1989, removal of the external, regulating force was final—and perceived as such. Its disappearance produced not a state of nature but a series of anguishing personal and familial dilemmas throughout the region. Television tends all the time to personalize issues in mistaken ways. Nonetheless, it seems to me that in this case the television reporting of the conflict has often been revealing for that very reason. Time and again we have seen and heard the story, essentially the same story, from Catholics, Muslims, and Orthodox Serbs: tales of families previously friends who now try and shoot one another, of mixed marriages torn apart. "What am *I* to do, what are *we* to do about this situation where we may find ourselves under Croat/Muslim/Serbian rule? Where *they* will be deciding job opportunities, who gets what, who owns what? What about our children? Will they really grow up with fair opportunities in this new free-but-capitalist world where they will almost certainly have to work in a Croat/Muslim/Serb-owned farm, factory or office?" (Maybe American—or German-owned, of course—but then



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with a Croat/Muslim/Serb management and career-structure?)

It doesn't matter much from which communal angle these questions were (are) being posed. The point is the nature of the questions. There is, surely, nothing whatever irrational about them. If anything they have often struck at least one viewer as, by current Western norms, somewhat narrowly overrational. Commentators on Eastern Europe have many times suggested that one of the ironic legacies of communism is a kind of ultraprivatization of outlook—an unwillingness to run any risks at all in a public or civic domain seen as alien and corrupt. I don't know the area well enough to guess whether such attitudes played a significant part in the Bosnian shambles, but I suppose it's possible.

## Undemonic Nationalism

Nationalism is all too often depicted as the imposition of abstractions on "ordinary life" by ideologues. Here, one fails to see that ordinary life needed any help. In a region structured in that way, with that history and that recent politics, such fears were all too reasonable—on all sides. As reasonable as the next thought, which could not fail to occur: this fear can be got rid of only if *they* (the other lot) can be moved on, or out of the way. In addition to which, if not encouraged to decamp, *they* will certainly do the same to us (as they once did in times past, and so on).

What this meant, surely, was a sudden spillage of the most combustible known human fuel over an unprecedentedly wide area. To worry (or, to worry overmuch) about just who applied which match to it, or with what precise intentions, is a bit absurd. Of course national "extremists" and outright psychopaths moved in to seize the life chances denied them by the rigid old régime: "organized brigands and irresponsible partisans." The Evans brothers were very hard on the "Bashi-Bazouks" or Muslim militiamen called up to keep the Christians in order. Savage brutes, they wrote, "Raw levies dressed in the ordinary country costumes—the red turban and sash, loaded with antiquated pistols and *handshars* or short sword-knives . . . beating a diabolical tattoo on drums shaped like the bowls of spoons." One can without difficulty translate these descriptions into the television images of today and yesterday.[4]

Naturally the new power centers in Zagreb and Belgrade sought at least to consolidate their authority, and then to extend it wherever they could in disputed zones. But chauvinism and criminality could obtain sensational successes only because of the area's underlying, inherited configuration. Robert Hayden's conclusion in the account quoted previously is that partition was inevitable, because:

> Yugoslavia's brief exposure to relatively free elections brought not democracy but the replacement of state socialism with state chauvinism. . . . Once the logic of division was accepted, the partition of Bosnia and Herzegovina was as inevitable as the partition of Yugoslavia itself, for if Yugoslavia could not exist as a common state of Serbs, Croats, and others, neither could Bosnia.

The assorted criminals involved in its carve-up were also assisted by the truly preposterous position of the West. With few exceptions, both the European and international communities have from the beginning declared two things loudly and simultaneously: (1) "You must be free!"—that is, adopt democracy and market economics; (2) "No existing frontier must be altered!"—that is, no one must in any way tamper with any line between existing populations (who must, by implication, also stay put where they are). It seems to have been taken for granted that "existing frontiers" meant the internal ones of the old federation as well as those (for example) between Yugoslavia, Hungary, Greece, and the other surrounding states.

When applied to Bosnia-Herzegovina these principles were in more or less total contradiction. There, "being free" ("democracy" in Karadzic's sense) meant doing something about the inherited mosaic of peoples, and the widespread fear (or panic) that the collapse of Yugoslavia had caused. This meant (however interpreted) some people and boundary lines shifting or being shifted, winners and losers, contemporary anger swiftly justified as revenge and the righting of past wrongs.

Elsewhere in Europe such a transition had taken place in many stages, as a result of various wars and resultant peace processes, often through complex and recurrent negotiations and concessions defining the status and rights of minorities. Together these make up a good deal of what historians call "the Age of Nationalism." But in this part of ex-Yugoslavia, as a result of the way interethnic unity had been artificially conserved, the transition took place in a vilely compressed and explosive form. During the crisis the international community has mainly stood on the sidelines, first talking what amounted in a Bosnian view to aggravating gibberish and then—when blatantly ignored—resorting to breastbeating and belated damage limitation.

Meanwhile, on the ground itself what could on no account be contemplated or allowed has taken place:



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a crude repartition of Bosnia-Herzegovina. In due course this will be refined and renegotiated, with all sorts of concessions about the numerous remaining minority questions and the status of Sarajevo. The new frontiers will duly be declared inviolable, and the demographic traces of the old one will mostly have disappeared.

## Beyond Ethnic Cleansing

One mercy (I hope) will be the simultaneous effacement of the phrase "ethnic cleansing." Whichever murderer invented *etničko čišćenje,* all that this parrot phrase has really achieved is to sum up a sort of metropolitan bemusement at the Bosnian events and to impede any solution to them. On one hand, it rightly deplores maltreatment and forcible deportation; but then these are also moral truisms repeatedly endorsed (for example) by Presidents Tudjman and Milosevic. On the other (and this is the real bite), it also tends to imply that any movement of population or borders *must be of that sort*—a betrayal of pre-existing harmony, as it were, made or forced with motives indistinguishable from those of Nazism. Hence all conceivable solutions become tragedies. Eastern tragedies too, a Balkanic fate which we in the continent's West End have most blessedly escaped.

In reality, where (as in this odd situation) peoples cannot co-exist tolerably, and minority status is impractable, then they have to separate. This is bound to be very bad for many of them, but it does not have to mean civil war. Had the outside world more readily recognized the disruptive consequences of dissolving the Bosnian protectorate, and been ready earlier on actively to assist the resettlement of its communities, then things might (at least) have been better than they presently are. They might have been less like Ignatieff's state of nature, and more like the normal minority problems elsewhere in the wider area—Trieste, for instance, Vojvodina or Macedonia.

However, such readier recognition was not possible. It would at once have been denounced as surrender to nationalism. "*No surrender*": the tone of international relations remained that of the cold war, locked into rigid imperatives of stability and Great Power propriety. These are indeed the tones that resonate in different ways in the judgments of Ignatieff, Kennan, and Hughes. A fossilized anti-nationalist order has continued to preside over the more molten, dislocated, and nationalist world following the great change.

Hayden's overall verdict on the war is that the Vance-Owen plan merely "took a house divided and proclaimed it as a condominium." Partition was inevitable, but could have been carried out in a more tolerable way. "The international refusal to accept the partition of Bosnia and Herzegovina that was made inevitable by the partition of Yugoslavia ensured that it would be accomplished in the worst possible way." While no solution was possible without violence and imposition, at least some of the victims might have been "persuaded of the futility of resisting partition and agreed to an exchange of populations." Bad, but definitely this side of Hell. Instead of which Civilization insisted on recognizing and preserving a Bosnian-Herzegovinian state (albeit in increasingly spectral form)—and "made a truly terrible situation worse."

Paradoxically, all that the rigid antinationalism of pundits and statesmen has achieved is to exacerbate the most deplorable features of nationalism. *New York Review* rigidity on the theme manages to take the worst side of nationalism at its own face value, perceive it everywhere—and hence unintentionally encourage it everywhere. All nationalism is Balkanization and archaic lunacy; hence it has to be crushed, or at least restrained by Kennan's "outside force"; the advocacy and application of such remedies cannot in turn fail to justify those among the new leaders who (as in Serbia) always proclaimed that force was the only answer, and *ethnos* its sole valid principle.

I mentioned earlier that another example worth taking into consideration is Northern Ireland—the small bit of Eastern Europe that happens to be on its western coast. There too one finds an ancient imperial marchland, a history of patchwork settlement, a reciprocal siege mentality, a capital town divided between community factions and armed gangs, a largely arbitrary frontier that must be preserved at all costs, and plenty of organized brigands capable of the wildest atrocities. People had got used to it and, after twenty-five years, tended to forget about it except during atrocity days or, exceptionally, atrocity weeks designed to remind them of this national question still unresolved by huge amounts of outside force and astronomical quantities of well-meant sermonizing and persuasion.

Twenty-five years of it have failed to dent either the conventional wisdom on the subject of nationalism or the prevalent theories of sovereignty and international relations—a fact hardly encouraging either to Bosnians or to ignorant radicals. But it would take another article to explain why. □



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## Notes

[1] "There is no place of Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently no Culture of the earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of Time; no Letters; no Society; and which is worse of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short . . ." Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan,* Part I, Ch.13.

[2] Arthur J. Evans, *Through Bosnia and Herzegóvina on Foot, during the Insurrections, August and September 1875* (London, 1876), Chapter 2, "The Old Military Frontier, Siscia and the Save." Evans (1851–1941) later became a famed archaeologist, notably for his work at Knossos in Crete.

[3] Robert Hayden, "The Partition of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1990–1993," in the *RFE/RL Research Report,* 2:22 (May 1993), p. 13.

[4] The most astonishing and revealing film coverage of the conflict so far has come from the Russian director P. Pawlikoski. His documentary *Serbian Epics* was made for BBC2's *Bookmark* program and shown on December 16, 1992. It features Karadzic as poet and family man, as well as political chieftain, and the "cabinet" of the Serb-Bosnian state, all armed to the teeth with the equivalent of antiquated pistols and *handshars*.

**Shlomo Avineri**

# THE RETURN TO ISLAM

A specter is haunting Europe—and the world in general: the specter of Islamic fundamentalism. All the world powers have entered unto a holy alliance to exorcise this specter: the pope and the president of Russia, Helmut Kohl and Françors Mitterand, French radicals and German police agents, and of course the CIA and right-wing Israeli politicians.

Beyond semantic quibbles ("fundamentalism" is a deeply Christian term, and has no meaning, or even equivalent, within the Islamic tradition), the phenomenon of Islamic revival is obviously gathering force. But is it a danger to world stability and Western civilization? And should one look under every bed for Muslim fundamentalists the way some people (sometimes the same people) used to look for communists in the good old bad days of the evil empire?

To understand both the phenomenon and its possible ramifications for world politics, some historical perspective on the tribulations of Islam in the modern world is necessary.

Even if one does not follow the highly exaggerated and willful distortions of Edward Said's "orientalist" argument, there is no doubt that the encounter between the West and the mainly Muslim Arab world has had the far-reaching consequence of undermining the self-assurance of Arab Muslim culture. That Western scholars, missionaries, and archaeologists were accompanied, ever since Napoleon's time, by either the political or the military might of Western powers or the threat thereof gave the cultural encounter a subtext of domination and subordination. The copying of school systems and military academies, the introduction of newspapers, philosophical tracts, and political institutions, the whole project of "modernizing," "Westernizing" and "secularizing" the Levant: all these were aimed at (re-)creating the Orient in the image of the Occident. The underlying assumption has always been that Islam—as a culture and not only a religious creed—was primitive, underdeveloped, retrograde, at best stuck in the memory hole of a medieval splendor out of which it could not disentangle itself without a radical transformation; and this could only be based on Western, "rational," "progressive" values. Ex Occidente lux.

Much of this criticism of Islam, despite its obvious and simplistic Eurocentrism, was true: didn't the Muslim Arab world, once the apogee of



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civilization, truly lag behind the West and its achievements? Wasn't it the case that the Ottoman Empire, once the scourge of Christendom, had degenerated into "the sick man of Europe," losing by stages much of its territorial conquests to Russia, Austria, and resurgent European national movements—the Greeks, the Serbs, the Bulgarians, the Rumanians? Didn't the semi-independent Egyptian Khedivate, from Muhammad Ali onward, continually seek Western support, culminating in the digging of the Suez Canal? Didn't the Ottoman Empire, by introducing the reforming *Tanzimat*, acknowledge the superiority of Western values and technologies over its own decrepit structures?

Arab nationalism itself in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was premised upon the adoption of Western institutions, attitudes, fashions, and modes of thinking and behavior: liberal constitutionalism or Marxist socialism, the theory of the nation-state or semi-fascist Ba'athist ruminations. Western ideas and structures, coupled with industrialization, urbanization, the emergence of a "middle class" and—last but not least—the acquisition of Western military technology and training were the means by which the Arab Muslim world would "catch up" with the West: always a linear project, in which the Arabs had to look to the West as their model. Whether the model was Paris or London, the Third Reich or the Kremlin, it was always a Western paradigm.

When PLO intellectuals maintain that their movement is "the Zionism of the Palestine people" they pay, unbeknownst to themselves, the ultimate compliment to this emulation of the West: isn't Zionism to them an alien, Western importation? And that in many cases it was Christian Arabs, and in some cases also Jews, who were in the forefront of this adoption of Western models, only accentuates the internal problematics of these developments. In the 1940s, the Egyptian communist party was made up almost exclusively of either Copts or Jews, both usually graduates of English or French schools, to which their bourgeois parents sent them to imbibe Western culture—which, dialectically, they did by absorbing the Western critique of Western society. And in Iraq the Jewish immigration to Israel in the 1950s decimated the Iraqi Communist party (one of the reasons why the right-wing government of Nuri Said allowed the exodus in the first place). Even in the Palestinian movement, the most radical and Marxist elements are predominantly Christian Arabs, more specifically members of the Greek Orthodox Arab community which has for complex historical reasons played a unique role in this radicalization of Arab thinking.

Looking at this development in retrospect, it is obvious that the debacle it bequeathed to Arab society has left deep scars and feelings of alienation and frustration—especially, of course, among the Arab intelligentsia that has been its torchbearer. Edward Said, himself coming from a family that converted to Anglicanism in the late nineteenth century and who, like other members of the Arab Jerusalem elite, attended St. George's Cathedral School in Jerusalem, is a poignant and tragic example of this alienation. Like many prodigal sons and daughters of his generation, he was shocked into re-adoption of Palestinian identity after 1967: Theodore Herzl would obviously understand his quest and sympathize with it.

The tragedy of the Arab world has been that over the last decades Arab societies have tried every variety of Western political ideology—monarchical constitutionalism, republicanism, varieties of Marxism and socialism, whiffs of fascism, "Third World" radicalism—and all have failed to heal Arab societies. Instead of enlightened monarchs, the Arab world got King Farouk; instead of secular republics, the Syrian turmoil of the 1950s, culminating in the ascendancy of the Syrian Ba'ath and Assad; instead of Arab socialism, windbags and paper tigers like Nasser or bloody dictators like Saddam Hussein.

These failures have been compounded by the even more humiliating failure in the most important and overarching project of secular Arab nationalism—the confrontation with Israel and its destruction. The demise of communism has given the final death blow to the currency of Western ideas in the Arab world: it appears now that Arab society has tried every Western remedy and has failed dismally. In the course of this attempt to emulate Western ideas, Arab society became atomized, cut off from its own tradition and mores, confused and deracinated. Oil, mostly but not exclusively found under the sand of traditional, sparsely populated dynastic kingdoms and emirates, only marginally mitigated some of the hardships of modernity. And the spectacle of Arab countries rich in history and tradition, like Egypt and Syria, having to queue up, hat in hand, to get the crumbs off the tables of disgustingly rich desert sheikhs only exacerbated the feeling of humiliation and frustration. This, of course, also explains the grudging admiration Saddam Hussein evoked even among so many Arab intellectuals who, for political and prudential reasons, opposed his occupation of



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Kuwait. But why should a self-respecting intellectual, especially if imbued with Western ideas of justice, equality, and democracy, have any particular sympathy for the rich, profligate emirs of Kuwait? Imagine the reaction of New York intellectuals if they found their universities, publishing houses, theaters, and banks physically controlled by rural conservatives from deepest Mississippi? This is obvious and unjust stereotyping, but the emirs of Kuwait live up to the stereotypes.

It is in the context of this dismal failure of all Western models, from liberalism to Marxism, that the return to Islam has to be understood. Paradoxically, some of the Islamic activists are frustrated communists or *communisants*—the phenomenon can be seen among the Palestinian intelligentsia as well as in non-Arab Iran (and not all of it is, in the Iranian case, pure accommodationism to the Islamic regime's repression: after all, in Teheran it was the shah, and not John Stuart Mill, who personified Western ideas). In a deracinated society, where Western ideas appear not in the form of excerpts from the *Federalist Papers* but are made flesh in the form of jeans, jazz, drugs, a confusing sexual revolution—Islam becomes the only substitute for the emancipatory ideas imported from the West that have so hopelessly failed. It is the detritus of Western civilization—which exists, of course, also in the West, but is accompanied there and at least partially compensated for by the sweet charms of bourgeois and post-bourgeois society—that drives so many people in the Arab world to mosques, to prayer classes, to the Quran, looking for "roots," "authenticity," "self-hood."

It certainly does not sit well with a secular left-wing Israeli intellectual to express such empathy for the return to Islam. But wouldn't a Zionist recognize some—obviously not all—of these phenomena as a mirror image, albeit distorted, of some of the motives of the Zionist quest for self-identity? Zionism is not, in any way, coeval with what is now called Islamic fundamentalism. Zionism is basically secular, though drawing on a religious tradition; the return to Islam is an exclusively religious phenomenon; but the idea of a Return, from the wasteland of a Western exile, is not totally alien to anyone who understands the deep roots of Zionism.

The reasons for this return to Islams are not, of course, identical with the project itself, and many facets of this project are obviously obnoxious. The point I am trying to make here is that the principle of the return to Islam cannot be totally subsumed under some of its least appealing expressions—like the re-imposition of the veil or the terrorist proclivities of some Islamicist groups. But just as Meir Kahane and Gush Emunim (and each of these is very different from the other) are not identical with Zionism or its "essence," though they are obviously part of the historical Zionist phenomenon, so the Islamic return is highly differentiated. Western observers, and especially people on the left, should not fall into the trap of an abstract and blanket demonization of Islam.

Nor should they overlook the paradoxical fact that if one looks for European parallels for the Iranian revolution, the nearest example would be the Puritan revolution—a radical attempt at a literalist interpretation of a Holy Book, a reaction against the corrupting influence of luxury and rampant consumerism (in both cases epitomized by a frenchified court), sumptuary laws, restrictive dress codes (especially for women), extreme intolerance toward dissenters from the politically institutionalized divine truth, and so on, and so on. No doubt, Puritanism in its later manifestation, after the defeat of its republican excesses, eventually contributed to the emergence of modern democracy. But the Whig interpretation of history is a highly biased and one-sided Victorian construct and has little to do with "really existing" Calvinist Puritanism as it manifested itself in Calvin's own Geneva, Knox's Scotland, Cromwell's England, and witch-hunting New England.

It is this misunderstanding of the deeper cultural upheavals in Arab society that pushes otherwise enlightened and tolerant Western observers to turn intolerant when confronted with its outward symbols within their own secular societies. A French intellectual who objects to the wearing of head-covering Muslim dress by female students in French state schools may evoke the principles of *laicité*, which also prohibits the wearing of a cross in school. But the analogy is a misleading. A cross in an adornment, merely accentuating a person's belief; wearing the "right" dress is, for a Muslim woman, part of her self-identity as a "pure," "uncontaminated," "righteous" woman: without it she may feel, literally, naked. One does not have to adopt such a view in order to understand it and feel obligated, on libertarian grounds, to respect it. Safeguarding French republican schools from symbols of an ultramontane Catholicism, which is the nominal religion of the majority of the population, is a different proposition from respecting the religious self-identity of a minority. When such intolerance toward the Muslim minority in France from *laïque*



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intellectuals is accompanied by statements to the effect that Muslim immigration to France challenges the outcome of the battle of Poitiers, one wonders who really is engaging in cultural warfare. Murderers like Radovan Karadzic may be trying to win friends and influence people by explaining that their genocide against Bosnian Muslims is nothing but the defense of European Christendom against the hordes of barbaric Islam. French intellectuals should know better.

This analysis has to be widened to include developments in postcommunist Central Asia, where the bogey of a resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism is raised by a new type of cold warrior. True, the Central Asian former Soviet republics are now trying, under stress and with great pain, to establish themselves after decades of Soviet oppression, and in the process they are also attempting to reconstruct their identity. True, most of their citizens, in most of the republics, are nominally Muslims; true, after seventy-five years of Soviet rule, they are trying to regain their Islamic heritage—just as Russians and Ukrainians are doing with regard to their respective Christian traditions (and former Soviet Jews too). Yes, they are building mosques—just as Russians are rebuilding cathedrals and churches; but just as not every return to Russian Orthodoxy leads necessarily to Pamiat and rabid anti-Semitism (though the danger is there), so not every assertion of Muslim identity in Alma Ata, Ashkabad, or Bishkek means adopting Iran as a model. As a matter of fact, the Turkish example is seen as a much more relevant model by these new nations and their leaders—Muslim but secular and moderate—than the ayatollahs from Teheran. That all but one of these nations are Turkic speaking (only Tadjikistan is Farsi) also helps the Turkish option—but then why should Western experts and pundits on "Islamic fundamentalism" (sometimes former experts on "Communist aggression") know such trifling details?

The paradox is that Central Asia has indeed experienced the emergence of a murderous Islamic fundamentalist state, where various Islamic sects are now slaughtering each other and threatening to spread their internecine killings into neighboring countries—but we have the perspicacity of American policies and the fine-tuning expertise of the CIA to thank for it: Afghanistan. The rights and wrongs of the U.S. support for the Mujaheddin at a time when America saw Iran as a major strategic danger in the Middle East must be left to a separate discussion (which will, of course, be complicated by the fact that the Afghan war did contribute toward the weakening of the Soviet Union). But what is indisputable is that American intervention, using the most extreme "fundamentalist" groups to destabilize the Soviet-supported regime, brought about the present internal instability in Afghanistan that threatens the whole region, especially along the sensitive Tadjik border. If Tadjikistan, the only former Soviet republic in danger of going fundamentalist, is helped along that path by its ethnic cousins within feuding Afghanistan, liberally endowed with Western-supplied arms, somebody at Langley should get a medal.

Another dialectical outcome of the U.S. support for the Mujaheddin is that many of the volunteers recruited by the CIA in the Arab Middle East to fight in Afghanistan have now returned to their own countries and become the spearhead of the most violent Islamic groupings. In Egypt, for example, it is these "Afghani" who are the hard core of the Islamic terrorism that poses a serious threat to President Hosni Mubarak's regime. Both their Islamic fanaticism and their familiarity with deadly explosive devices have been acquired with U.S. taxpayers' money somewhere along the Pakistani-Afghan border.

Islam, as a culture that encompasses much more than religion, is a rich repository of norms, traditions, social and political institutions: most of them are unpalatable to a Western, secular mind, and the sentimental, "anti-orientalist" idealization of Islam, now sometimes fashionable in the West, is rubbish. But, per contra, it is simplistic, Western cultural imperialism—be it liberal or Marxist—to think that the West, with its own internal, modern and postmodern problems, can give adequate answers to Islamic societies. Two centuries of *hubris* ought to have disproved the proposition that all the Islamic East needs is an injection of Western Christian or post-Christian values and institutions.

Terrorism inspired by Islamic fanatics should be fought tooth and nail—and this is what the security services of the Western and Middle Eastern countries are and should be doing, by means not always pleasant. But Western intellectuals and statesmen should not mount a new crusade against Islam. Wrong enemy, wrong-headed thinking. □



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GÜNTER GRASS

# PITY ON CUBA

There is an island that must be seen: a model that is being phased out. Hurry to visit before the last traces are obliterated, for the victors will not put up with any leftovers, and in Miami people are already fighting over the spoils.

Our trip to Cuba began at East Berlin's Schönefeld Airport; from German Democratic Republic days the airport still has that penetrating Prussian-socialist odor of Lysol that no Western chemicals have been able to dissolve. Someone asks us to take two packages of medicine to Havana; the intended recipient, a doctor, is identified by his address on the packages. Such things are lacking on the isolated island. The blockade imposed by the United States decades ago and recently tightened includes medical supplies. This is supposed to be a humanitarian measure, intended to promote human rights in Cuba at long last.

We will soon witness the results of this get-tough policy: the pharmacies with bare shelves, the desperate resort to the natural methods of healing espoused by "green" medicine, the pitiable condition of old people especially, who in any case show the marks of the rationing of all foodstuffs—which is barely keeping famine at bay.

Of course it can be shown—the evidence is plentiful—that the isolated island's dependence on the Soviet Union (forced upon the Cubans not least by the blockade) left Cuba with a centrally planned economy whose chronic tendency toward shortages cannot respond to the present emergency. But there is no mistaking the fact that the winner of the cold war wants to starve out Cuba, which means eleven million people. The allied countries—with the Federal Republic of Germany in the lead—stalwartly support this stupid and inhumane goal. Deliveries of powered milk to Cuba, begun in the days of the GDR, have been cancelled, while Chancellor Kohl has chosen to provide that model democracy Indonesia with a number of leftover warships from the GDR fleet. The hypocrisy of the victors knows no bounds.

Yes, it's true. The triumphal reports in the Western press are quite right when they tote up the successful outcome: Havana looks wretched. Shop windows are empty or else they display a few dreary wares, testimony to the growing shortages. Bookstore shelves do not groan under belletristic overproduction. Where foodstuffs—vegetables here, bread elsewhere—are sold for ration coupons calculated in local currency, people have to stand in line. These people do not express any particular faith in communism, yet a few days later they will participate, albeit reluctantly, in something called an election. The results, after a turnout alarmingly close to 100 percent, cannot but confirm the existing power structure, which has undergone only slight and all-too-cautious changes.

No, these were not democratic elections following the Western model. To be sure, they were carried out properly, as we observed in the town of Trinidad. There were election booths and a folded ballot. But nothing like a recognizable opposition was allowed to present itself to the voters. Instead—as was stressed again and again—for the first time voters had a choice of candidates, among them surprisingly many who did not belong to the ruling party of this one-party regime: doctors, scientists, artists. Take, for example, the writer Miguel Barnet, who won 98 percent of the vote in his electoral district, yet received the news of his landslide diffidently, saying this represented too great a responsibility. It was his first time running for public office: he had always been an outsider, not only as a Christian, but as someone who had not been allowed to publish any of his books in the seventies—those had been the worst years. Now all this recognition! He felt crushed—so much was expected of him.

Barnet has often traveled abroad. His books are now widely distributed. The difficulties he experi-



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enced at the hands of the party and the Writers' League did not lead him to turn his back on his country and escape animosity by going into exile. He sees what cannot be overlooked—that the established revolution is painfully attempting to free itself of its inherited dogmatic rigidity and no longer wants to be confined to patterns imported from the Soviet Union. Instead, the revolution is harking back to its origin and finding the beginnings of its tradition in the example of the liberal bourgeois revolutionary José Martí. (Even Fidel Castro was not a communist when he, along with a few other men and women, and eventually with popular support, launched the revolution and in 1959 overthrew the dictator Batista.)

Nobody—not Miguel Barnet, nor anyone else with whom we spoke in Havana, Trinidad, and Pinar del Río—wants a second Batista. They suspect that one is just waiting in Miami to hop on a plane. And they all alluded, more or less tentatively, to the need for reforms. But no one, I was told, could be allowed to turn the results of the revolution into its dreaded opposite. I heard this from older men and women working in the tobacco fields around Pinar del Río. The revolution had given these people a self-respect and a measure of social security, and they were less likely to notice the absence of liberal rights than would foreigners on a brief visit or those Cuban intellectuals who, more than two years ago, wrote an open letter to Fidel Castro in which they rightly demanded full freedom of expression.

The intellectuals were dealt with harshly. The poet Maria Elena Cruz Varela and the poet and translator Jorge Pomar were condemned to two years in prison. Shortly before Pomar was arrested by the police, he was beaten up by the infamous "rapid commandos." Today he is out on parole, forbidden to leave the district in which he lives until his sentence is up (some time this year). Maria Elena Cruz Varela is in a prison hospital. Her term, too, is scheduled to end this year.

I mentioned both cases to a large number of members of the Cuban Writers' League, among them the chairman, Abel Prieto, who belongs to the central committee of the ruling party. For close to four hours opinion clashed with opinion. Yet it was not just my lone protest against a solid front; views changed in the course of the discussion. In not one reply did I run up against the standard cynicism of which Herman Kant had been the exemplary exponent in GDR times.* Basically our discussion focused on one question: had publishing the open letter to Fidel Castro in the foreign press, namely in Miami, justified treating the authors as criminals? I reminded them that the letter signed by GDR writers to protest the expulsion of the balladeer Wolf Biermann also had to be published in the West because the Communist party newspaper *Neues Deutschland* had refused to print it.

Perhaps the comparison with the narrow-minded behavior of the GDR functionaries and my principled protest caused some of the assembled Cuban writers and even Abel Prieto to reflect. Yet I do not feel confident that my intervention did any good. Whether or not Maria Elena Cruz Varela and Jorge Pomar will suffer further harassment will probably only become clear after their terms are up. We can only hope that the much touted "new course" will lead to liberalized behavior.

This look back at our stay in Cuba allows me to remind the Cuban Writers' League and its chairman of their promise to give both writers a hearing. They suffered an injustice, an injustice that is not at all diminished by the fact that in countries committed to North American interests—Turkey or South Korea, for instance—far greater injustices are perpetrated every day.

The units by which the West measures democracy have become questionable. Now that capitalism alone, with all its liabilities, remains, it should become evident that in many areas Cuba not only stands up well in comparison to capitalist countries but that it has accomplished some exemplary things through its revolutionary transformation. The health-care system available throughout the country provides one general practitioner, whose services are available at no cost, for every eight hundred families. No other third world country offers such coverage. In each village we saw a two-story house (usually the only one) that had living space upstairs for a doctor and a nurse with their offices on the ground floor. The results are reflected in reports issued by the United Nations and the statistics compiled by other respected international organizations: the low infant mortality rate and high life expectancy could provide a model, not only for the so-called underdeveloped countries but perhaps even for the United States, whose new president, responding to the scandalous conditions in his country, has begun a search for reforms. I am referring not to showy things like high-tech model clinics or organ transplants—Cuba has those, too, by the way—but rather to a socially equitable system of

*Herman Kant headed the East German Writers' Union.—Eds.



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care, of a sort that Mexico has not even begun to realize. We had no sooner left the isolated island than we witnessed unmistakable deprivation in the Maya villages of the Yucatan Peninsula and the slums of Mexico City, which seem to spread further every day.

I know that an exemplary health-care system means little in a period when ideological stubbornness insists on the elimination of social safety nets. In their stupidity, the cold war's victors keep looking for reassurance that the enemy has been extirpated root and branch. But who would be helped by the restoration of Cuba's old power elite? Surely not the Cuban people. I would think that the powerful United States of America has enough misery at its own doorstep—whether in Mexico or in Haiti—not to mention the rising curve of social distress within its own borders. The world has no shortage of wars and civil conflicts, but it has a desperate need for socially equitable redistribution. If it has learned anything from the most recent calamities and from the tragedy in the former Yugoslavia, Europe might take the first step and lift a blockade that will result in untold hunger and suffering. If political insight is in short supply, perhaps Christian neighborly love—an item not much in evidence nowadays—will come into play: pity for Cuba!

After a short visit I know that this pitiable and lovable island has something to offer besides shortages and a nice climate. For example, there was the ninety-four-year-old woman who still sorts tobacco leaves, as she has since she was ten, right next to the little platform in her cigar factory, where they still read aloud to entertain and instruct the workers, as they once did for Hamburg's cigar-wrappers. Or there are some of the thirty thousand Cubans who studied in the GDR, learned German and now look after tourists, who flaunt their prosperity with their hard-currency dollars. And something that remains unforgettable: on this so fortunate and unfortunate island, descendants of all those who came over the ocean, whites, blacks, and mulattos, know how to live together without the aggressive racism that results in daily killings in Cuba's neighbor.

To put in a word for Cuba also means bringing up the unavoidable figure of Fidel Castro. Perhaps, although his rhetoric still has vitality, he has outlived himself. People said that about Yugoslavia's Marshal Tito as well, until one day he was no longer there. Today, Europe's shameful failure teaches us to judge Tito's accomplishments more generously. Anyone who wants to see Castro gone should think carefully about how to fill the vacuum that this large and flawed man (like Tito) would leave.

TRANSLATED BY KRISHNA WINSTON □

**Anson Rabinbach**

# FIRE AND BLOOD IN GERMANY

After the arson murder of three Turkish women in the town of Mölln last fall, the worst appeared to be over in Germany. Demonstrations and candlelight marches of hundreds of thousands against racism and xenophobia seemed to prove that Germans overwhelmingly reject neo-Nazi violence and far-right appeals to racial hatred. Only six months later, in the wake of the arson that left five women burned to death on May 29 in Solingen, a prosperous West German industrial town, such optimism is as scarce as a lone foreigner on most German streets after dark. Nightly arson attacks have become epidemic, and neo-Nazi skinheads bolder and more lethal. Hundreds of hate crimes have been reported since the Solingen murders, and for the first time, Turkish residents rioted. In the town of Aschaffenburg, Turkish youths reacted with a violent attack on the political headquarters of the Christian Social Union. The specter of Los Angeles on the Ruhr haunts Germany.

The cool reaction of the "political class" to the steadily escalating antiforeigner violence since the



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first attack on a hostel in Hoyerswerda in September 1991 sent the message that there would be no massive police intervention as was used against the "Red Army" terrorists in the late 1970s. Politicians focused not on the violence and the skinhead milieu, but on panicky scenarios of Germany being "flooded" by impoverished minorities abusing Germany's liberal asylum law as a pretext for immigration. This past spring all three major parties collaborated on a series of amendments that in effect dismantled the constitutional guarantee of right of asylum (Paragraph 16). Parliament placed harsh restrictions on applicants, who must come from countries specifically designated as persecutory. They must petition for asylum status before entering the country, and they can now be (and already are) refused entry at borders and airports.

No one can say for certain if the new law, ratified only days earlier, sparked the new wave of violence. Anarcho-Nazis do not coordinate their actions according to any overarching strategic plan. Skins get soused, listen to racist "Oi" rock and taped Hitler speeches, and hunt down or burn up foreigners in an alcoholic haze. Most are under eighteen, and only a few (including one twenty-three-year-old arrested for the Solingen murders) are connected to far-right organizations. But the rare unity shown by the three major parties in exclusively curbing asylum seekers while ignoring the issues of citizenship and civil rights of foreigners living in Germany made clear to even the dumbest skinhead that politicians were bowing to antiforeigner sentiment. The ruthlessness of the Mölln and Solingen assaults, and the nightly arson attempts that followed, demonstrate that the patent failure of politicians to set reasonable goals for immigration (Germany has no statutory immigration law) or to extend citizenship to foreign residents was nothing short of disastrous.

Helmut Kohl's refusal to attend the funeral of the Solingen victims in Turkey spoke more loudly than his banalities about Germany remaining a land that is "open, hospitable, and above all friendly to foreigners." And even those words were calculated to underscore their "foreign" status, including that of children born in Germany. Kohl also came close to excusing the attacks by claiming they were motivated by the plight of "asocial" youths, who, he said, exist everywhere. The contrast with President Richard Von Weizsäcker, who told a memorial service in Cologne that the murders of Mölln and Solingen are not "unconnected, isolated outrages," but are the product of "a climate created by right-wing extremism," could not be more conspicuous. The wreath-laying at Bitburg showed the world that Kohl is a consummate master of what might be called symbolic dissonance: the coded message in the political gesture totally overshadows and negates the countereffect of manifestly right-thinking public discourse.

This time, however, foreign reaction was so negative, especially in the Turkish press, that Kohl and other leading politicians quickly reversed course. Since the end of May strong appeals have been issued from all parties to alter Germany's 1913 ethnic citizenship law written at the high tide of pre-World War I nationalism (see *Dissent*, Spring 1992). A solid majority of Germans believe that foreigners should be given the right to vote in municipal elections and, surprisingly, most now also support the granting of dual citizenship. To be sure, Social Democratic party (SPD) voters are more strongly behind this idea, but even conservative voters are evenly divided. Both the liberal Free Democratic party (FDP) and the Social Democrats have already proposed new draft legislation. Kohl himself told parliament in early June that he would approve a change provided that acceptance or rejection of German citizenship came after a five-year period in which dual status is permitted.

Still unclear is whether this would also mean granting citizenship retroactively to everyone born in Germany, which would automatically encompass several generations still classified as foreigners. Nor has Kohl taken the key step to accepting a change from current racial definition of citizenship *jus sanguinis* (literally blood law) to the territorial *jus soli* accepted by most Western nations. Naturally, any alteration in the German law would also entail significant changes in voting patterns, probably in favor of the Social Democrats. Most important, such a revision would redefine what it means to be a "German." A unified Germany would officially include diversity, and many Germans are not ready to unmake the traditional nation-state ideal that they feel was denied to them until only yesterday. Nor is there any guarantee that such a reversal in self-identity would curtail rather than encourage the racist fringe.

One barrier to the success of any change in the citizenship law is the widely held perception that unlike other "European" minorities, Turks intransigently resist cultural integration, and as Muslims are "the most foreign of the foreigners." The newsweekly *Der Spiegel*, in a cover story following the Solingen murders, proclaimed that "the German Turks are a showcase for miscarried—because it was never desired—integration." Such pessimistic prog-



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noses are self-serving and self-fulfilling. Rudolf Augstein, the magazine's editor, rejects dual citizenship as a "magical cure" and insists that Turks should either become Germans or remain Turkish.

For critics like Augstein, cultural "integration" is equated with "assimilation" rather than political equality. Yet if Turks remain "foreign until now," the causes lie as much in political as in cultural attitudes. Augstein's definition of citizenship recapitulates the nineteenth-century ideal of the "cultural nation" with its homogeneous linguistic and historical traditions. Modern nationhood, however, does not require a standardization of beliefs, attitudes, and literary references. Yet cultural assimilation is greatly inhibited by the absence of civil rights. Among the 1.8 million Turkish-Germans there is a wide spectrum of attitudes towards integration, especially among those born in Germany. Studies show that many first- and second-generation young people would opt for dual citizenship, even if it meant incurring anger from their tradition-bound parents. Alongside those who favor adaptation and integration, there is also a marked revival of Islamic fundamentalism evident in radical anti-Western groups like the "Party of God." Claus Leggewie, a Giessen political scientist, fears that "the more they feel themselves rejected by the Germans, the better the prospects for nationalist and Islamic Fundamentalists who reject every kind of integration."

Although some have lived in Germany all their lives, foreigners still cannot vote or hold civil service positions—including teaching, police, sanitation, or postal jobs. No law prevents discrimination in housing or employment. Even with these constraints, the Turkish minority in Germany has demonstrated remarkable economic success, and in some respects is typical of West Germany's postwar ethos with its exaggerated emphasis on family ties and work as laudable virtues. Though poverty still exists among recent arrivals, the days of the "gastarbeiter" (guest workers) at the bottom of the social ladder are in the past. Social distinctions among Turkish Germans have widened. According to *Der Spiegel*, the number of Turkish-owned businesses has increased to thirty-five thousand, and employment in the upper ranges of the labor market is impressive.

The wave of violence has also severely damaged relations with Turkey, already strained last year when the use of German arms shipments against unarmed Kurdish demonstrators caused a major political scandal and the resignation of Germany's armaments minister. In June, Turkish headlines asked "whether the German people will bathe the world in fire and blood for the third time in this century." The foreign press was quick to point out the obvious discrepancy between pious statements of regret and the constitutional curbs on asylum voted by the German parliament.

Despite its savagery, contemporary neo-Nazism remains a marginal phenomenon. Membership in "organized" far-right extremist groups is estimated at sixty-five thousand and sympathy for the violence does not seem to be increasing. The threat to democracy comes more from the challenge that xenophobia poses for German national identity. Jürgen Habermas fears that since 1989 conservative intellectuals have "celebrated a 'departure' from the old Federal Republic." These circles aspire to a renewed tradition of German hegemony in Central Europe. He foresees a growing polarization between those who date the important caesura as the Federal Republic's pro-Western, anti-nationalist, and democratic identity after 1945, and those who consider 1989 as a decisive turn toward "secret fantasies of the new/old European great power Germany."

Perhaps more disconcerting is a recent poll that revealed that 7 percent of the population is skeptical that either of the two major parties can solve "political problems in Germany." Younger people seem especially torn between the moral commitments that many Germans self-consciously adopted after the collapse of Nazism, and the climate of ethnic particularism and national self-assertion evident throughout Europe. For this reason, the upcoming debate about German citizenship promises to further dramatize the core question of what it means to be German today—after 1989, and a half-century after 1945. □

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**Adam Ashforth**

# A LETTER FROM SOWETO

There is a dog in Snake Park, a settlement on the outskirts of Soweto, called De Klerk. He is a white dog. Well, he would be white if he could shed the fine brown dust of this place. In the evenings when the gates are being locked you can hear a Zulu voice hurling the name at the darkening shacks: "De Klerk, De Klerk, Woza, De Klerk!" Come, De Klerk. During the day, De Klerk roams the streets of Snake Park with the pack. But at night's fall, the canine state president belongs in the yard. His mission is clear: guard the house. The house, a tin and asbestos shack, is a butcher's shop.

De Klerk the dog and the butcher shop in Snake Park belong to Mr. Dladla. When discussing politics, Dladla is fond of saying: "Government is a crook." Although Dladla is a staunch supporter of the African National Congress (ANC), and fully expects its victory in the elections next April, whatever happens in the future, his dog De Klerk, along with half a dozen other canine security agents, will remain at his post. For while many people have great expectations that one day "The People Shall Govern," it is hard to see how, when that day dawns, the mess created under the name "apartheid" can easily be cleaned up. It is harder still to see how justice might be secured for the poor and oppressed in South Africa given the massive incompetence and corruption of public institutions. And as St. Augustine once noted, "Without justice what is government but a great robbery?"

At the memorial service for Chris Hani, Communist party secretary-general assassinated last April, ANC President Nelson Mandela exhorted his followers not to live in the past but to build for the future. On an everyday basis millions of people across the country are doing just that. There is a tremendous strength and resilience in people like those with whom I stay in the Mapetla Extension district of Soweto. They have managed to build a thriving community in the face of the harsh conditions of apartheid. I am constantly inspired by people like my friends the Sello family, who, despite living cramped in a one-room tin shack in a dusty settlement, can turn out their children every morning immaculately dressed in their school uniforms and eager to learn. But when I try to analyze the prospects for transformation of the major institutions of state and economic power, I find it hard not to despair.

Generally speaking, the situation here is volatile and will probably become more so as the election approaches. A small group of men with guns can cause a lot of trouble. As the endemic violence of the past few years and the events surrounding the assassination of Chris Hani demonstrate, there is no shortage either of trigger-happy men or of guns. If the people of South Africa are ever to succeed in creating a civilized political sphere, they will have to devise policies to deal with these men and their weapons. This will not be easy, given the legacy of apartheid. For it will eventually require a new government, most likely with Nelson Mandela as president, calling on armed forces commanded mostly by Afrikaners to suppress people on the white right wing (whom those commanders consider their brother Boers) while also calling on the same forces to suppress black militants (whom many in the ANC see as brothers).

## "The Fight"

Most of the young activists I know in Soweto are locked into forms of politics that are hardly appropriate, nor are they equipped with the skills necessary, for the task of building a new state. The predominant metaphor of political action here is the "fight." And there is no shortage of people, mostly young and male, for whom fighting—in all its form—is second nature. Fewer know how to build or harness angry energies into creative solutions. Nowhere is this more evident than in the schools and colleges of Soweto where the limited opportunities



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for advancement are constantly squandered in the name of one "struggle" or other. For one example, some of the boys at Mapetla Tswana High School, nicknamed the "Nicaragua School of Socialism" regularly hit "targets" in the form of delivery vehicles. Sometimes they just stone vans, other days they might hijack a vehicle and burn it in the schoolyard, provoking fights with the police and reliving the glory days of *umzabalazo* (the struggle). Such "revolutionary actions" succeed in canceling classes and drying up supplies of milk and bread to the neighborhood for a few days.

The mothers of Soweto know the consequences of fighting too well. It is upon their shoulders that the heaviest burdens fall when the bodies have to be healed or buried; and it is all too easy for simple disputes or misunderstandings to become violent feuds. When people are in dispute, the mother of the family I stay with, MaMfete, strives to sit them down to talk, to work out a solution to their problems. She will gather the antagonists in her kitchen and listen to their explanations. When everyone has been heard, MaMfete will speak, quietly analyzing the accounts and pointing out the various "mistakes" (her term) which have been made. Generally, people will then acknowledge what they have done and make amends. But if they cannot talk in a civil and respectful manner—like Mandla (the name means "Power"), who, brimming with righteous indignation one afternoon in October, lashed the back of his girlfriend with an electrical cable to punish her for talking to another man—MaMfete will settle for peace without justice. "There is no justice in this place," MaMfete told me on that occasion. There is rarely any point in going to the police, for they are mostly vicious, corrupt, and incompetent; nothing can be done. And seeking justice by private means can be a dicey business, especially when angry young men are involved.

Some months back, some "comrades" and I were engaged in such dicey "justice"—we tried to find a way to "discipline" (a favorite South African word) a thug in the Mapetla district of Soweto near where I stay. South Africa is one of the few places left on the planet where the appellation "comrade" is mutually pleasing. In Soweto it is loosely used to identify members and supporters of "progressive" organizations,—that is, *not* Inkatha, the Zulu nationalists led by Chief Buthelezi—and to distinguish political activists from criminals. The criminals are known as "thugs" or "tstotsis." Sometimes they carry the name with pride. In this instance, a comrade friend of ours had been stabbed by a local thug. So some young activists convened a meeting to discuss the issue. I joined them because I've known them all for a long time. I was happy to be included, but had no intention of showing my white face at the thug's door demanding retribution.

At five o'clock we gathered at Vusi's house. Vusi (not his real name) is a young man in his early twenties whom I met a couple of years ago when he was active in the war against the Inkatha members at the Merafe Hostel in Mapetla. Along with several others, he is serving a suspended sentence for the murder of a thug who was raping girls in the area. They beat the offender to death with shovels after he raped Vusi's cousin.

Vusi is a family man. He is living with his mother, his girlfriend, and their baby, trying to make a living sewing clothes. When we arrived he was working with an old Singer hand winder, hemming a pair of blue jeans. They live in one of the two-room houses of Phiri district of Soweto. Four comrades are already there when we arrive. The young man with the thug problem is smoking a huge joint. No-one else joins him, though the fag-ends of cigarettes are passed from hand to hand before they die.

We had some difficulty getting the story straight. It seems that the aggrieved comrade, let's call him Mathatha, was involved in a complicated domestic dispute with his stepsister and stepfather. Mathatha's mother, who usually sides with her son, had on this occasion backed the others. His name had been taken off the Lodger's Certificate, which means he won't be able to inherit the house when his mother dies, nor even stay on as a lodger. The details, though, are murky. The thug who stabbed him is his stepsister's boyfriend. What kind of dispute they had was never made clear. But it was clear that Mathatha felt exposed on the streets because two of his friends had recently left the country for training in the ANC military wing (the *Umkhonto We Sizwe*.) The ANC was, and probably still is, recruiting and training such volunteers as conventional soldiers in expectation of the eventual integration of *Umkhonto* with the South African Defense Force.

Vusi suggested that the correct procedure to follow before disarming and disciplining the thug was to inform the secretary of the Civic Association and speak to Mathatha's mother. But Mathatha objected. He did not want anyone speaking to his mother. The facts were simple, he argued. He had been stabbed by that thug, who was part of a group of six or seven thugs. They have only one gun, a 9mm pistol, and the first priority, Vusi now argued, was to disarm them. Vusi has experience in this line



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of work having successfully relieved several policemen of their weapons.

During the discussion, four other comrades arrived. We were now ten. Consensus was reached. It was resolved that Monday evening at five o'clock the comrades, along with twenty or thirty "reinforcements," would go in groups of two and three to the culprit's place and issue a "warning."

After the meeting, my friend Sipho was very concerned that the delegation be coolheaded. For if the thug is humiliated he can later avenge himself, attacking the comrades one by one. If the comrades start knocking him around instead of just talking to him, the fight may escalate and people will die. It's a question of balance. Another friend of mine reckons that the only way to deal with such an offender, if you are really serious, is to get a gun and kill him in the dead of night without being seen by anyone. (You can easily get a 9mm pistol and a few bullets for fifty rands [about $17].) That way you get rid of your problem without the risk of having your house burned down and your family endangered.

When the appointed hour arrived and the comrades assembled at Phiri, Mathatha was nowhere to be found. Four of the comrades were in a trigger-happy mood, for they were about to leave the country for military training in *Umkhonto We Sizwe*. Eventually Mathata turned up, drunk and three hours late. His comrades were not impressed, so nothing happened.

## Future Problems

If justice, peace, and prosperity are ever to be secured for the people of Soweto, it can only be as a result of the establishment of a legitimate system of government establishing conditions of personal security at the level of the state as a whole. In recent years the South African police have been trying to shed their image as enforcers of apartheid. But it will be a long time before they have any credibility in black communities, even under a black national government. The ANC seems set to take the front seat in government in the near future; and it is certainly the ambition of all the liberation movements to create a responsive system of policing and justice, along with a commitment to providing work and opportunities for all. Whether democratically elected governments will in fact be able to take the reins of state power is, however, another matter.

Most of the people I know in Soweto support Nelson Mandela and the ANC. The ANC is confident that it enjoys majority support within the country as a whole. But the problem for the ANC is that it enjoys very little support among people holding key positions within the state and the economy, most of whom are white. In the short-to-medium term, too few of the ANC's supporters will be sufficiently qualified to move into these key positions. The problem is how to transform the system while maintaining the state infrastructure and services that already exist. Without the assistance, if not the active support, of the incumbent bureaucrats, particularly the armed bureaucrats, capitalists, members of the professions, and managers, neither the ANC nor any other party, could govern this large, complex, and powerful state. Even with that assistance, corruption and incompetence will remain the norm.

Over the past couple of years, the ANC leadership has come to recognize the limitation on its potential power as a majority rule government. It has proposed the idea of a "Government of National Unity and Reconstruction" (which the present National party government is pleased to refer to as "power-sharing"). This would be a "transitional" solution during the period—the expectation is five years—between the election of a constituent assembly next April and the formal institution of a new constitution.

An executive body of state would be established, following national elections for a constituent assembly, comprised of members nominated by all significant parties. Such a body would most likely be dominated by the ANC and the National party. There is widespread discontent in the black townships, however, over the leadership's acceptance of power-sharing with the "regime." Many younger militants are beginning to suspect that the spoils of the struggle are not going to fall their way.

Some of my more militant friends have left the ANC and moved into the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), attracted by the more revolutionary rhetoric and the continuing commitment to "armed struggle." But the PAC seems to be a shambles as an organization. Its political leadership does not appear able to coordinate with its external military organization, the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA). This caused the PAC much embarrassment during a recent spate of attacks on white people attributed to APLA's "Year of the Great Storm" campaign. The situation in South Africa these days is so confused that angry young men can easily band together to launch attacks on the police or white people, call themselves "APLA" and be trumpeted as such in the media, while the PAC leadership, both



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political and military, will have no idea who their warriors are.

Although some PAC members claim there is an "Africanist" philosophy, which their organization upholds, few people that I have met can articulate it in terms radically different from those embraced by the broad ideological umbrella of the Congress Alliance (ANC, Communist party, and Congress of South African Trade Unions). So, as one comrade who left the ANC Youth League to join APLA put it: If PAC joins negotiations I may as well go back to ANC because, in elections, at least they can win." It is hard to imagined the PAC ever governing a state, yet if it maintains its political purity as a radical opposition, it could serve as a lightening rod for the manifold discontents of black South Africans under an ANC government.

## Race Politics

The governing party of apartheid, the National party, also seems to be increasingly confident that it can win majority support in the polls, if not at the first vote for a constituent assembly, then at the next vote (probably five years hence) for a government under a new constitution. According to press reports, the National party probably enjoys majority support among the so-called "Coloured," "Indian," and "White" populations. It may also be able to form alliances with conservative African political organizations (which may eventually include Buthelezi's Inkatha Freedom party). In time, the National party may be able to capitalize on the growing discontent among Africans who worry that "Liberation Movements" may not be able to deliver the work and security people desire. Over the past few years in Soweto, unemployment and economic hardship have been increasing, and it is not so unusual to hear people harking back cynically to the bad old days of apartheid—when at least you could get a job.

An abiding question for any future government remains the destructive potential of the white right wing. My experience, as a white man who has lived in Soweto off and on over several years, persuades me that the extent of racial animosity toward whites among black South Africans is remarkably small. Peopled are generally committed to the idea of a common humanity; "Black and white should live together" is the common refrain. Given the extent of the brutality inflicted upon African people and the stupidity of the collective insult that Europeans have wreaked upon African society in the name of colonialism and apartheid, this commitment to "nonracialism" (an official doctrine of the ANC) is extraordinary.

Yet, ironically, it was perhaps the very existence of apartheid itself, the existence of an evil system that officially categorized people according to notions of "race" and against which people could unite in a struggle for justice, equality, and a better life, that kept overt racial antagonism at bay. Even the more exclusivist political ideologies such as Pan Africanism and Black Consciousness have been at pains, at least in their official pronouncements, to denounce racism and racialist thinking. The slow demise of apartheid, however, also undoes the sense that the daily pains of a hard life are linked to inevitable progress toward freedom. In the three years since the liberation movements were unbanned and Nelson Mandela released from prison, more particularly since the civil war with Inkatha reached Soweto in August 1990, despair has become much more evident. If the promise of better things is not realized soon in a new South Africa, the hope that nurtured the moral ascendancy of the anti-apartheid movements may turn to a pervasive despair. Then the lunacies of the white right wing might provoke in black people racial hatred that has hitherto been manifested mostly as "crime," giving it the political edge white South Africans have long dreaded.

So much for politics. The elections will come in 1994 and life will go on. The dogs will continue to bark at night; some will be chained, some will roam free. Winter is settling in, and with it the dry season. Nights are getting cold and the winds are coming to whip up the dust. When the winds stop, every surface in Soweto's houses will be covered with fine brown powder. Then the women will set to work dusting and polishing before the winds blow again tomorrow. The yards must be swept, too, and the "stoeps" (porches) and windowsills polished black or red.

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Every morning, Ndi, our next-door neighbor, sweeps her yard. One arm behind her back, like her mother before her, she bends double as she flicks the short straw switch across the hard clay ground. Building upon her mother's labors in the yard of the four-room "matchbox" house, which the grandfather sitting under the tree and his family occupied in 1964, Ndi has already swept the yard to a depth of six inches below the level of the foundations. The new South Africa might arrive before she needs a step ladder to get into the house. □

**Zhores Medvedev**

# THE DEATH OF BIG SCIENCE IN RUSSIA

From 1987 to 1991 the largest construction project in the Soviet Union was neither a new hydroelectric station nor an oil pipeline. It was the world's largest proton synchrotron accelerator in Protvino, a small science town about a hundred kilometers south of Moscow. The twenty-one-kilometer-long underground tunnel ring with a diameter of five meters (comparable to the circle line of the Moscow metro) had already been excavated, and people were working around the clock to assemble the massive vacuum chamber with large bending and focusing superconducting magnets, each six meters long and weighing many tons. A special factory had been built in Serpukhov, a nearby industrial city, to manufacture the two thousand magnets needed for the accelerator. The world's largest helium liquefying plant, designed to generate thirty thousand liters of liquid helium per hour, was also under construction. Liquid helium was required to keep the temperature in the giant vacuum chamber as close to absolute zero as possible.

The accelerator (known as UNK, from the Russian term for acceleration storage complex) was expected to begin fixed target experiments in 1993. It belonged to the Institute of High Energy Physics, part of the research network of the Soviet military-industrial nuclear empire, commonly known as Minsredmash (short for the USSR Ministry of Medium Machinery). Soviet atomic scientists had never had to consider costs, even when they rose to billions of rubles. Protvino had already become famous among particle physicists because its previous proton accelerator, one kilometer long and with an acceleration energy of seventy-six billion electron-volts (76 GeV), had also been the largest in the world when it was commissioned in 1967. A higher particle energy (four hundred GeV) was only achieved in 1972, when a larger synchrotron, seven kilometers in length, was built by the U.S. National Accelerator Laboratory in Illinois.

The UNK was designed for three trillion electron-volts (three TeV) energies. A second ring for the acceleration of protons in the opposite direction was expected to be added and linked to the first part of UNK in 1995. The system would be transformed into a six TeV collider, giving Soviet physicists the unique opportunity to make discoveries in the trillion electron-volt range. The nearest American rival, the Superconducting Super Collider, an eighty-four-kilometer-long, twenty-TeV giant costing $8.5 billion, had been under construction in Texas since 1990 and was not expected to be able to smash protons until 1999.

Construction and assembly work in Protvino slowed down, however, toward the end of 1991 and ground to a halt in 1992. The paymaster, Minsredmash, had disappeared along with Gorbachev's government and the USSR itself. A new, smaller Russia embarking on "shock therapy" economic reform did not have the means to subsidize the



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expensive projects of big science, which did not produce immediate practical benefits.

UNK was not the only victim of the collapse of the USSR. In Dubna, a science town 120 kilometers north of Moscow, the world's largest synchrophasotron (built in 1957 for the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research) ceased operating because of shortage of funds. This machine was famous not only for the information it gave about heavy ions physics, but also because its gigantic 36,000 ton magnet was listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the world's heaviest magnet. The USSR Academy of Sciences was particularly renowned for its cosmic ray particle physics. In 1992, however, the world's highest altitude cosmic ray station (built 3,340 meters above sea level in the Tien Shan mountains) was nationalized by Kazakhstan. The Pamir astrophysical station was taken over by Tajikistan. Civil war there made it inaccessible to scientists. A third astrophysics station of the Lebedev Physics Institute, which boasted the world's largest hadron apparatus, built at an altitude of 3,200 meters on Mount Ararat in the 1970s, was also out of action: after five years of war in Nagorny Karabakh, Armenians cared little about cosmic ray particles.

A similar fate befell the world's largest neutrino detector laboratory belonging to the Institute of Nuclear Research. The site seemed perfect when it was set up in the eighties with two gigantic halls for the scintillation telescopes in a four kilometer tunnel excavated in the northern slopes of the Caucasus Mountains in the Ka/bardin-Balkar Autonomous Republic. By 1992, however, it had become a war zone between independent Georgia and the newly formed Muslim Federation of the Mountainous Peoples of the North Caucasus. The laboratory was designed to detect neutrinos from the gravitational collapse of stars and from past and present supernova. Unless the war with Georgia ends soon, this task, and the privilege of discovering black hole formations in distant galaxies, will pass to Japan, which plans to construct a giant neutrino detector—Super-Kamiokande—in a mine in the Gifu Prefecture.

## Forgotten Secret Atomic Towns

Igor Kurchatov, the father of the Soviet atomic bomb, was an influential supporter of theoretical nuclear physics. He realized that prominent Soviet physicists would be mobilized to participate in the bomb project only if they were able to do theoretical nuclear physics at the same time. His strategy attracted such famous physicists as Igor Tamm, Yakov Zeldovich, Lev Landau, and Lev Arzimovich. Andrei Sakharov joined this team in 1948 when he was Igor Tamm's graduate student. In addition to solving some of the puzzles of the thermonuclear bomb, Sakharov made a significant contribution to the creation of the first Soviet plasma reactors, known as Tokamaks, for doing experiments on controlled nuclear fusion.

The first of the Soviet secret atomic towns (*atomgrads*), which were built in 1946–1947, were Cheliabinsk-40 and Cheliabinsk-65. The two merged later, and by 1990 they had a population of 83,500. The first Soviet plutonium producing reactors were built here in underground shelters and the first reprocessing plant, *Mayak*, was constructed in 1947 to extract plutonium from spent nuclear fuel. The third secret atomic town, which combined theoretical nuclear physics with facilities for designing and producing bombs, was built in the Gorky region, sixty kilometers southwest of Arzamas. Later it became known as Arzamas-16 or Kremlev, and it now has a population of 80,300 people. The first Soviet atomic and thermonuclear bombs were designed and assembled here, but they were tested in the Semipalatinsk region of North Kazakhstan, where the fourth secret *atomgrad*, Semipalatinsk-21, was built.

Soon several other *atomgrads* were built to satisfy military demands for nuclear weapons. Tomsk-7 or Seversk, in Siberia, with a population of 107,000, is the largest. It contains five plutonium producing reactors that also provide electricity and heating for the residential areas, a large reprocessing plant, a uranium enrichment plant, and nuclear waste disposal facilities that dispose of waste by pumping radioactive liquids into the deep porous geological formations four to five hundred meters below the surface of the earth. Further east are Krasnoyarsk-26 or Zheleznogorsk (population 63,300) and Krasnoyarsk-45 or Zelenogorsk (population 90,300), built in the 1950s. Three large reactors, reprocessing plants, and a gas diffusion enrichment plant were located for protection in tunnels and cavities excavated in the mountains by Gulag prisoners. Krasnoyarsk is the most modern atomic industrial site, and it is also the most important nuclear waste disposal facility for both military and civilian energy reactors. A more modern nuclear bomb production plant combined with an experimental physics research institute was also built in the Cheliabinsk region in the 1950s, about twenty kilometers north of the first *atomgrad*. It is now known as Cheliabinsk-70 or Snezinsk. There are a few other *atomgrads* built for military



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purposes (Penza-19, Zlatoust-36, Sverdlovsk-44 and 45, and others) but they do not specialize in research.

Although James Baker, then U.S. Secretary of State, and American experts from the Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories were invited to visit the Cheliabinsk-70 secret center (probably because it was the most modern) in February 1992, the best nuclear physics research was done at the Arzamas-16 institute devoted to plasma physics or controlled thermonuclear fusion reactions in mixtures of deuterium and tritium. The pride of the institute, demonstrated to visitors only in 1992, was the world's largest laser pulse reactor, capable of heating plasma to temperatures of up to 100,000,000°C, high enough to register the emission of nuclear fusion neutrons. Designated *Iskra-5* (which means that this is the fifth model), the machine is housed in a huge five-story cross-shaped building filled with more than two thousand registration apparatuses. It is made of twelve powerful lasers, each two hundred and fifty meters long. The laser beams are focused on a small drop of plasma, where the heat energy reaches thirty kilojoules (kJ), high enough to start the fusion of deuterium and tritium nuclei but not yet powerful enough to compress the mixture to the level that can produce a sustainable chain reaction. For each pulse the lasers need about ten trillion watts of electric energy, which is accumulated in special condensers. The Minsredmash empire always received free electricity.

It has been calculated that a self-sustainable chain reaction could be achieved if the power of the lasers reached the megajoule (GJ) range. The Arzamas scientists were ready to build the next generation of laser to make this possible. It took thirteen years to build *Iskra-5* and it has been making two pulses a week since 1989. By way of comparison, it is interesting to note that the most powerful laser in Europe at present is the twelve-kJ, ten-TW facility at Limeil, which belongs to the French *Commissariat a L'Energie Atomique*. A nine-year plan for the development of a one-hundred-kJ, one-thousand-TW pulsed laser facility was recently adopted as a joint project by five European nations, with a projected cost of about $300 million (*Physics World,* August 1990). However, the funding has not yet been provided.

When the USSR collapsed and Minsredmash disappeared, the *atomgrads* were temporarily forgotten. Their highly privileged priority supply systems ceased to exist and they became dependent for money, food, and consumer goods on the rather poor regional authorities in the areas where they were located. The U.S. government, together with the governments of some European countries, pledged nearly $100 million last spring to set up a special International Research and Technology Center in Moscow to help redundant nuclear scientists from the *atomgrads* to transfer their skills to the civilian sector. After nearly a year, however, no one has yet received any grants. Desperate scientists and engineers are now spontaneously declassifying their work and leaving the secret towns in search of employment. A museum of Soviet nuclear weapons systems has already been opened in Arzamas-16, and a museum of big nuclear physics may follow.

## Science Towns in Limbo

Nowhere else in the world would one find something like Akademgorodok, the Novosibirsk academic town situated twenty-five kilometers from industrial Novosibirsk on the high bank of an artificial lake in the Siberian taiga forest. It was established in 1957 from a small wooden house in which its founder, Professor Mikhail A. Levrentiev, lived. By 1990 it had become a well-planned, beautifully built town free from industrial pollution or noise. With a population of 200,000, it has 120 research institutes and a university.

Other science towns appeared throughout the country in those years. Some, like the biological center Pushchino, ninety kilometers north of Moscow, or Chernogolovka, were rather small, with populations of about 25,000. Others, like Obninsk, Zelenograd, Dubna, and Gatchino were larger, with populations approaching one hundred thousand. They represented a social compromise between the main academies and the government. The latter wanted the scientific infrastructure to be decentralized and to move closer to industrial centers. But it was difficult to convince prominent scientists to leave Moscow, Leningrad, and other capital cities unless they were promised the relative prosperity and comfort available in the capitals. The science towns were isolated privileged islands, geographically separated from the usually overcrowded, polluted, and poor industrial cities like Omsk, Novosibirsk, Sverdlovsk, Karaganda, Tyumen, and others, where the legacy of Stalin's crash industrialization and the Gulag slave labor system was still too visible.

In 1973-1974 science policy was reversed. The oil crisis in the West gave the Soviet Union an unexpected flow of hard currency revenues, and hundreds of millions of petrodollars were made



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available for science. New research institutes were established, but now they were built in the rich suburbs of Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Minsk, Baku, and other capitals. Some of them surprised visitors not only with their excellent science, but also with their architectural extravagance. The DNA-shaped Institute of Bio-Organic Chemistry in Moscow, for example, with its marble floors, opera-style conference halls, a sauna, swimming pool, and winter garden, cost $150 million and took nearly ten years to be completed by its Finnish contractors. The new cardiological and oncological centers, both architectural landmarks of the suburbs of Moscow, reflected the attitude of the aging Brezhnev leadership. One of them was built for Professor Evgeny Chazov, Brezhnev's personal doctor and the director of the Kremlin clinic, and the other for Nikolai Blokhin, the chief government surgeon. The presidium of the USSR Academy of Sciences itself, previously comfortably housed in an old aristocratic mansion surrounded by a park, decided to build a monstrous twenty-six-story skyscraper on the banks of the Moscow River with eight modern elevators and full air conditioning. It was completed in 1990, and the transfer of the bureaucratic personnel from the old mansion to the new tower had not yet been completed when the collapse of the USSR made the Academy beg for money to survive.

In 1993 Moscow research institutes finally began to earn money by renting out surplus space in their monumental buildings to domestic and foreign businesses. In the remote science towns, however, no such solution was possible. Shortage of money made the government try to select priority research projects, but there was no easy way to lay off scientists or support staff, since there was no alternative employment nearby. The administration of the academies have recently indicated that if there is insufficient money, they will abandon research in favor of supporting people. After all, brains are more important in science than big machines. □


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**Steven Lukes**

# FIVE FABLES ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

## What It Would Be Like If . . .

I propose here to discuss the topic of human rights as seen from the standpoint of five doctrines or outlooks that are dominant in our time. I don't propose to be *fair* to these outlooks. Rather, I shall treat them in the form of Weberian "ideal types" or caricatures—a caricature being an exaggerated and simplified representation which, when it succeeds, captures the essentials of what is represented.

The principle that human rights must be defended has become one of the commonplaces of our age. Sometimes the universality of human rights has been challenged: those historically proclaimed are said to be Eurocentric and to be inappropriate, or only partly appropriate, to other cultures and circumstances.[1] So alternative, or partly alternative, lists are proposed. Sometimes the historic lists are said to be too short, and so further human rights are proposed, from the second unto the third and fourth generation.[2] Sometimes the appeal to human rights, or the language in which it is couched, is said to be unhelpful or even counterproductive in particular campaigns or struggles—in advancing the condition and position of women,[3] say, or in promoting third-world development.[4] But virtually no one actually *rejects* the principle of defending human rights.

So, in some sense, it is accepted virtually everywhere. It is also violated virtually everywhere, though much more in some places than in others. Hence the pressing need for organizations such as Amnesty International and Helsinki Watch. But its virtually universal acceptance, even when hypocritical, is very important, for this is what gives such organizations such political leverage as they have in otherwise unpromising situations. In this essay I want to focus on the significance of that acceptance by asking: what way of thinking does accepting the principle of defending human rights deny and what way of thinking does it entail? I want to proceed in two stages: first by asking: what would it be like *not* to accept the principle? And second: what would it be like to take it seriously?

First, then, let us ask: what would a world without the principle of human rights look like? I would like to invite you to join me in a series of thought experiments. Let us imagine a series of places in which the principle in question is unknown—places that are neither utopian nor dystopian but rather places that are in other respects as attractive as you like, yet which simply lack this particular feature, whose distinctiveness we may thereby hope to understand better.

First, let us imagine a society called *Utilitaria*. Utilitarians are public-spirited people who display a strong sense of collective purpose: their single and exclusive goal, overriding all others, is to maximize the overall utility of all of them. Traditionally this has meant "the Greatest Happiness of the Greatest Number" (which is the national motto) but in

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more recent times there have been disputes about what "utility" is. Some say that it is the same as "welfare," as measured by objective indicators such as income, access to medical facilities, housing, and so on. Others, of a more mystical cast of mind, see it as a kind of inner glow, an indefinable subjective state that everyone aims at. Others say that it is just the satisfaction of whatever desires anyone happens to have. Others say that it is the satisfaction of the desires people ought to have or of those they would have if they were fully informed and sensible. Yet others, gloomier in disposition, say that it is just the avoidance of suffering: for them the "greatest happiness" just means the "least unhappiness." Utilitarians are distinctly philistine people, who are disinclined to see utility in High Culture and never tire of citing the proverb that "pushpin is as good as poetry," though there is a minority tradition of trying to enrich the idea of "utility" to include the more imaginative sides of life. But despite all these differences, all Utilitarians seem to be agreed on one principle: that what counts is what can be counted. The prized possession of every Utilitarian is a pocket calculator. When faced with the question "What is to be done?" he or she invariably translates it into the question "Which option will produce the greatest sum of utility?" Calculating is the national obsession.

Technocrats, bureaucrats, and judges are the most powerful people in Utilitaria and are much admired. They are particularly adept at calculating, using state-of-the-art computers of ever-increasing power. There are two political parties that vie for power—the Act party and the Rule party. What divides them is that the Act party (the "Actors") encourages everyone to use their calculators on all possible occasions, while the Rule party (the "Rulers") discourages ordinary people from using them in everyday life. According to the Rule Utilitarians, people should live by conventions or rules of thumb that are devised and interpreted by the technocrats, bureaucrats, and judges according to their superior methods of calculation.

Life in Utilitaria has its hazards. Another national proverb is "*Utilitas populi suprema lex est.*" The problem is that no one can ever know for sure what sacrifices he or she may be called on to make for the greater benefit of all. The Rule party's rules of thumb are some protection, since they tend to restrain people from doing one another in, but they can, of course, always be overridden if a technocrat or a bureaucrat or a judge makes a calculation that overrides them. Everyone remembers the famous case at the turn of the last century of an army captain from a despised minority group who was tried on a charge of treason and found guilty of passing documents to an Enemy Power. The captain was innocent of the charge but the judges and the generals all agreed that the doctrine of "*Utilitas populi*" must prevail. Some intellectuals tried to make a fuss, but they got nowhere. And recently, six people were found guilty of exploding a bomb at a time of troubles for Utilitaria caused by fanatical terrorists from a neighboring island. It turned out that the six were innocent, but "*Utilitas populi*" prevailed and the six stayed in jail.

These hazards might seem troubling to an outsider, but Utilitarians put up with them. For their public spiritedness is so highly developed that they are ready to sacrifice themselves, and indeed one another, whenever calculations show this to be necessary.

Let us now visit a very different kind of country called *Communitaria*. Communitarians are much more friendly people, at least to one another, than are the Utilitarians, but they are like them in their very high degree of public spiritedness and collective purpose. Actually, "friendliness" is too superficial a word to describe the way they relate to one another. Their mutual bonds constitute their very being. They cannot imagine themselves "unencumbered" and apart from them; they call such a nightmarish vision "atomism" and recoil with horror from it. Their selves are, as they say, "embedded" or "situated." They identify with one another and identify themselves as so identifying. Indeed, you could say that the Communitarians' national obsession is identity.

Communitaria used to be a very *gemütlich* place, much given to agricultural metaphors.



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Communitarians were attached to the *soil*, they cultivated their *roots* and they felt a truly *organic* connection with one another. They particularly despised the Utilitarians' calculative way of life, relying instead on "shared understandings" and living according to slowly evolving traditions and customs with which they would identify and by which they would be identified.

Since then Communitaria has undergone great changes. Waves of immigration and movements of people and modern communications have unsettled the old *gemütlich* ways and created a far more heterogeneous and "pluralistic" society. New Communitaria is a true "Community of Communities"—a patchwork quilt of subcommunities, each claiming recognition for the peculiar value of its own specific way of life. New Communitarians believe in "multiculturalism" and practice what they call the "politics of recognition," recognizing each subcommunity's identity with scrupulous fairness in the country's institutions. Positive discrimination is used to encourage those that are disadvantaged or in danger of extinction; quotas ensure that all are fairly represented in representative institutions and in the professions. The schools and colleges teach curricula that exactly reflect the exactly equal value of those communities' cultures and none (and certainly not the old *gemütlich* one) is allowed to predominate.

The new Communitarians feel "at home" in their subcommunities but further take pride in being Communitarians who recognize one another's subcommunitarian identities. But there are problems. One is the "inclusion-exclusion problem": how to decide which subcommunities are included in the overall framework and which are not. Some groups get very angry at being included in subcommunities that recognize them but that they don't recognize; others get angry because they recognize themselves as a subcommunity but are not recognized by others. Recently, for example, a province of Communitaria in which one subcommunity forms a majority passed a law prohibiting *both* members of their subcommunity *and* all immigrants from attending schools that teach in the language that prevails in the rest of Communitaria and in which most of its business and trade are conducted. The immigrants in particular are none too pleased. A related problem is the "vested interests problem": once on the official list, subcommunities want to stay there for ever and keep others out. Moreover, to get on the list, you have to be, or claim to be, an indigenous people or the victims of colonialism, and preferably both.

Then there is the "relativism problem." It is obligatory in Communitaria to treat the beliefs and practices of all recognized subcommunities as equally valid, or rather, none is to be treated as more or less valid than any other. But different subcommunities have incompatible beliefs and some engage in very nasty practices, mistreating, degrading, and persecuting groups and individuals, including their own members. Typically, the definers of subcommunitarian identities are men; and their women are sometimes oppressed, marginalized, and badly abused. Some require their womenfolk to conceal *their* identities in hooded black shrouds. Some practice female circumcision. Unfortunately, Communitaria's official relativism must allow such practices to continue unmolested. Recently, a famous writer from one subcommunity wrote a satirical novel that was partly about the life of another subcommunity's holy religious Prophet and Founder. Hotheads from the latter subcommunity became wildly incensed at what they took to be an insult to their faith and publicly burned the book in question, while their fanatical and fiery leader, in the home community from which they came, ordered the famous writer to be killed. Other writers from other subcommunities all over the world signed petitions and manifestoes in the famous writer's defense. Communitaria's government dealt with this tricky situation in a suitably relativistic way, declaring that the practice of writing satirical novels was no more but also no less valid than the practice of protecting one's faith against insults.

And finally there is the "deviant problem." Not all Communitarians fit well into the subcommunitarian categories. Recalcitrant individuals have been known to reject the



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category by which they are identified or to pretend that they don't belong to it. Some cross or refuse to acknowledge the identifying boundaries, and some even reject the very idea of such boundaries. Non-, ex-, trans-, and anti-identifiers are not the happiest people in Communitaria. They feel uneasy because they tend to be seen as "not true Communitarians," as disloyal, even as "rootless cosmopolitans." Fortunately, however, they are few and unorganized. Least of all are they likely to form another subcommunity.

Now I propose to take you to another place which is called *Proletaria*, so called, nostalgically, after the social class that brought it into being but that has long since withered away, along with all other social classes. Proletaria has no state: that too has withered away. Indeed, it is not a particular country, but embraces the entire world. Human and other rights existed in prehistoric times, but these too have withered away. The Proletariat in its struggle sometimes used to appeal to them for tactical reasons, but they are no longer needed in Proletaria's "truly human" communist society.

Proletarians lead extremely varied and fulfilling lives. They hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon and criticize after dinner; they develop an enormous range of skills; and no one has to endure a one-sided, crippled development, to fit into a given job-description or role or an exclusive sphere of activity from which one cannot escape. The division of labor has also withered away: people are no longer identified with the work they do or the functions they fulfill. No one is a "such-and-such": as the prophet Gramsci put it, no one is even "an intellectual," because everyone is (among all the other things he or she is). They organize their factories like orchestras and watch over automated machinery, they organize production as associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, under conditions most favorable to, and worthy of, human nature, and they elect representatives to Communes on an annual basis. As the prophet Engels foretold, the government of persons has been replaced by the administration of things and by the conduct of processes of production. The distinction between work and leisure has withered away; so also has that between the private and the public spheres of life. Money, according to the prophet Marx, "abases all the gods of mankind and changes them into commodities" and has "deprived the whole world, both the human world and nature, of their own proper value,"[5] but now the whole "cash nexus" too has withered away. Now at last, as foretold, "love can only be exchanged for love, trust for trust, etc."; influence can only be through stimulation and encouragement; and all relations to man and to nature express one's "real individual life."[6] An arcadian abundance exists in which all produce what they are able to and get what they need. People identify with one another not, as among the Communitarians, because they belong to this or that community or subcommunity, but rather because they are equally and fully human. Relations between the sexes are fully reciprocal, and prostitution is unknown. In Proletaria there is no single dominating obsession or way of living: everyone develops their rich individuality, which is as all-sided in its production as in its consumption, free of external impediments. There is no longer any contradiction between the interest of the separate individual or the individual family and the interest of all individuals who have intercourse with one another.

The only problem with Proletarian life is that there are no problems. For with communism, as Marx prophesied, we see

> the *definitive* resolution of the antagonism between man and nature and between man and man. It is the true solution of the conflict between existence and essence, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species. It is the solution of the riddle of history and knows itself to be this solution.[7]

Yet visitors to Proletaria (from other planets) are sometimes disbelieving of what they behold, for they find it hard to credit that such perfection could be attained and, moreover,



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maintained without friction. How, they wonder, can the planning of production run so smoothly without markets to provide information through prices about demand? Why are there no conflicts over allocating resources? Don't differing styles of living get in each other's way? Aren't there personal conflicts, between fathers and sons, say, or lovers? Do Proletarians suffer inner turmoil? No sign of any such problems is visible: Proletarians seem able to combine their rich individuality, developing their gifts in all directions, with fully communal social relations. Only sometimes does it occur to such extraterrestrial visitors that they may have lost their way and landed somewhere else than Earth and that these are not human beings after all.

Human rights are unknown in all the three places we have visited, but for different reasons. Utilitarians have no use for them because those who believe in them are, by definition, disposed to question that Utilitarian calculations should be used in all circumstances. As the Utilitarian State's founder Jeremy Bentham famously remarked, the very idea of such rights is not only nonsense but "nonsense on stilts," for "there is no right which, when the abolition of it is advantageous to society, should not be abolished."[8] The Communitarians, by contrast, have always rejected such rights because of their *abstractness* from real, living, concrete, local ways of life. As that eloquent Old Communitarian speechifier Edmund Burke put it, their "abstract perfection" is their "practical defect," for "the liberties and the restrictions vary with times and circumstances, and admit of infinite modifications, that cannot be settled upon any abstract rule."[9] A no less eloquent New Communitarian, Alasdair MacIntyre broadens the attack: "natural or human rights," he says, "are fictions—just as is utility." They are like "witches and unicorns" for "every attempt to give good reasons for believing that there *are* such rights has failed." According to MacIntyre, forms of behavior that presuppose such rights "always have a highly specific and socially local character, and . . . the existence of particular types of social institution or practice is a necessary condition for the notion of a claim to the possession of a right being an intelligible type of human performance."[10] As for Proletarians, their rejection of human rights goes back to the Prophet of their Revolution, Karl Marx, who described talk of them as "ideological nonsense" and "obsolete verbal rubbish,"[11] for two reasons. First, they tended to soften hearts in the heat of the class struggle; the point was to win, not feel sympathy for class enemies. It was, as Trotsky used to say, a matter of "our morals" versus "theirs,"[12] and Lenin observed that "our morality is entirely subordinated to the interests of the proletariat's class struggle. . . . To a communist all morality lies in this united discipline and conscious mass struggle against the exploiters. We do not believe in an eternal morality, and we expose the falseness of all the fables about morality."[13] And second, Marx regarded human rights as anachronistic because they had been necessary only in that prehistorical era when individuals needed protection from injuries and dangers generated out of an imperfect, conflictual, class-ridden world. Once that world was transformed and a new world born, emancipated human beings would flourish free from the need for rights, in abundance, communal relations, and real freedom to develop their manifold human powers.

What, then, does our thought experiment so far suggest we are accepting when we accept the principle of defending human rights? First, that they are *restraints* upon the pursuit of what is held to be "advantageous to society," however enlightened or benevolent that pursuit may be. Second, that they invoke a certain kind of *abstraction* from "specific and socially local" practices: they involve seeing persons behind their identifying (even their self-identifying) labels and securing them a protected space within which to live their lives from the inside, whether this be in conformity with or in deviation from the life their community requires of or seeks to impose on them. And third, that they *presuppose* a set of permanent existential facts about the human condition: that human beings will always face the malevolence and cruelty of others, that



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there will always be scarcity of resources, that human beings will always give priority to the interests of themselves and those close to them, that there will always be imperfect rationality in the pursuit of individual and collective aims, and that there will never be an unforced convergence in ways of life and conceptions of what makes it valuable. In the face of these facts, if all individuals are to be equally respected, they will need public protection from injury and degradation, and from unfairness and arbitrariness in the allocation of basic resources and in the operation of the laws and rules of social life. You will not be able to rely on others' altruism or benevolence or paternalism. Even if the values of those others are your own, they can do you in in countless ways, by sheer miscalculation or mistake or misjudgment. Limited rationality puts you in danger from the well-meaning no less than from the malevolent and the selfish.

But often the values of others will not be your own: you will need protection to live your own life from the inside, pursuing your own conception of what is valuable, rather than a life imposed upon you. To do so, social and cultural preconditions must exist: thus Kurds in Turkey must not be treated as "Mountain Turks" but have their own institutions, education, and language. Now we can see the sense in which human rights are *individualistic* and the sense in which they are not. To defend them is to protect individuals from utilitarian sacrifices, communitarian impositions, and from injury, degradation and arbitrariness, but doing so cannot be viewed independently of economic, legal, political, and cultural conditions, and may well involve the protection and even fostering of collective goods, such as the Kurdish language and culture. For to defend human rights is not merely to protect individuals. It is also to protect the activities and relations that make their lives more valuable, activities and relations that cannot be conceived reductively as merely individual goods. Thus the right to free expression and communication protects artistic expression and the communication of information; the right to a fair trial protects a well-functioning legal system; the right to free association protects democratic trade unions, social movements and political demonstrations, and so on.

I turn now to the second stage of my inquiry. What would it be like to take human rights, thus understood, seriously? To approach this question, let me propose a further thought experiment. Let us now imagine worlds *with* human rights, where they are widely recognized and systematically put into practice.

One place where some people think rights flourish is *Libertaria*. Libertarian life runs exclusively and entirely on market principles. It is located somewhere in Eastern Europe or maybe in China in the near future. Everything there can be bought and sold; everything of value has a price and is subject to Libertarians' national obsession: cost-benefit analysis. The most basic and prized of all their rights is the right to property, beginning with each Libertarian's ownership of himself or herself and extending (as Libertarians like to say) to whatever they "mix their labor with." They own their talents and abilities and, in developing and deploying these, Libertarians claim the right to whatever rewards the market will bring. They love to tell the story of Wilt Chamberlain, the famous basketball player whom thousands are willing to pay to watch. Would it be just, they ask, to deprive him of these freely given rewards in order to benefit others?

They also attach great importance to the right of engaging in voluntary transfers of what they rightly own—transactions of giving, receiving, and exchanging, which they use to the advantage of their families, through private education and the inheritance of wealth. There is a very low level of regressive taxation, which is used only to maintain Libertaria's system of free exchange—the infrastructure of the economy, the army and the police, and the justice system to enforce free contracts. Compulsory redistribution is prohibited, since it would violate people's unlimited rights to whatever they can earn. Inequalities are great and growing, based on social class, as well as on differential talents and efforts. There is no public education, no public health system, no



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public support for the arts or recreation, no public libraries, no public transport, roads, parks or beaches. Water, gas, electricity, nuclear power, garbage disposal, postal and telecommunications are all in private hands, as are the prisons. The poor, the ill, the handicapped, the unlucky, and the untalented are given some sympathy and a measure of charity, but Libertarians do not regard their worsening plight as any kind of injustice, since they do not result from anyone's rights being infringed.

No one is tortured in Libertaria. All have the right to vote, the rule of law prevails, there is freedom of expression (in media controlled by the rich) and of association (though trade unions cannot have closed shops or call strikes, since that would violate others' rights). There is equal opportunity in the sense that active discrimination against individuals and groups is prohibited, but there is an unequal start to the race for jobs and rewards; the socially privileged have a considerable advantage stemming from their social backgrounds. All can enter the race, but losers fall by the wayside: the successful are fond of quoting the national motto: "The Devil take the hindmost!" The homeless sleeping under bridges and the unemployed are, however, consoled by the thought that they have the same rights as every other Libertarian.

Are human rights taken seriously enough in Libertaria? I believe the answer is no, for two reasons. First, as I said, the basic civil rights are respected there—there is no torture, there is universal franchise, the rule of law, freedom of expression and association and formal equality of opportunity. Yet the possessors of these rights are not equally respected; not all Libertarians are treated as equally human. To adapt a phrase of Anatole France, those who sleep under the bridges have the same rights as those who don't. Though all Libertarians have the right to vote, the worst off, the marginalized and the excluded, do not have equal power to organize and influence political decisions, or equal access to legal processes, or an equal chance to articulate and communicate their points of view, or an equal representation in Libertarian public and institutional life, or an equal chance in the race for qualifications, positions, and rewards.

The second reason for thinking that Libertaria fails to take human rights seriously enough relates to the distinctively Libertarian rights. Libertarians believe that they have an unlimited right to whatever rewards their abilities and efforts can bring in the marketplace and the unlimited right to make voluntary choices that benefit themselves and their families. No Libertarians ever take a step outside the narrowly self-interested point of view of advancing their own, or at most their family's, interests. They are impervious to the thought that others might have more urgent claims on resources, or that some of their and their family's advantages are gained at the expense of others' disadvantage, or that the structure of Libertarian life is a structure of injustice.

Are human rights in better shape elsewhere? Where is the principle of defending them more securely defended? Where, in other words, are all human beings more securely treated as equally human? Where are they protected against Utilitarian sacrifices for the advantage of society and against Communitarian imposition of a particular way of life, against the Communist illusion that a world beyond rights can be attained and against the Libertarian illusion that a world run entirely on market principles is a world that recognizes them fully?

Is *Egalitaria* such a place? Egalitaria is a one-status society in the sense that all Egalitarians are treated as being of equal *worth*: one person's well-being and freedom are regarded as just as valuable as any other's. The basic liberties, the rule of law, toleration, equality of opportunity are all constitutionally guaranteed. But they are also made real by Egalitarians' commitment to rendering everyone's conditions of life such that these equal rights are of equal worth to their possessors. They differ about how to do this but one currently influential view is that a basic economic and political structure can be created that can make everyone better off while giving priority to



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bettering the condition of the worst off: on this view no inequality is justified unless it results in making the worst off better off than they would otherwise be. All agree that progressive taxation and extensive welfare provision should ensure a decent minimum standard of life for all. But there is also within Egalitarian culture a momentum toward raising that minimum through policies that gradually eliminate involuntary disadvantage. That momentum is fueled by a sense of injustice that perpetually tracks further instances of illegitimate inequality or involuntary disadvantage—whether these result from religion or class or ethnicity or gender, and so on, and seeks policies that will render Egalitarians more equal in their conditions of life.

Could there be such a place as Egalitaria? More precisely, is Egalitaria *feasible*? Could it be *attained* from anywhere in the present world? And is it *viable*? Could it be *maintained* stably over time? Some doubt that it is feasible. Some say that, even if feasible, it is not viable. Some say that it might be viable, if it were feasible, but it is not. Others say that it is neither feasible nor viable. I fear that there are good reasons for all these doubts. I shall suggest two major reasons for doubting the attainability and the maintainability of Egalitaria and conclude by suggesting what they imply about how we should view the principle of defending human rights.

The first reason for thinking that Egalitaria may, after all, be a mirage is what we may call the *libertarian constraint*. This is found, above all, in the economic sphere. Egalitarians are (or should be) extremely concerned to achieve maximal economic growth. For them "equality" is not to be traded off against "efficiency." Rather, they seek most efficiently to achieve an economy that will attain the highest level of equality of condition at the highest feasible economic level. The worst off (and everyone else) under a more equal system should, they hope, be at least as well off as the worst off (and everyone else) under a less equal system. If the cost of more equality is lesser prospects of prosperity for everyone or most people, their hopes of attaining, let alone maintaining, Egalitaria, at least under conditions of freedom, are correspondingly dimmed.

Egalitarians these days are (or should be) keen students of Libertarian economics. For one thing, they know what markets can and cannot do.[14] On the one hand, they know when and how markets can fail. Markets reproduce existing inequalities of endowments, resources, and power; they can generate external diseconomies, such as pollution, which they cannot deal with; they can, when unchecked, lead to oligopolies and monopolies; they can ravage the environment, through deforestation and in other ways; they can produce destabilizing crises of confidence with ramifying effects; they can encourage greed, consumerism, commercialism, opportunism, political passivity, indifference and anonymity, a world of alienated strangers. They cannot fairly allocate public goods, or foster social accountability in the use of resources or democracy at the workplace, or meet social and individual needs that cannot be expressed in the form of purchasing power, or balance the needs of present and future generations. On the other hand, they are indispensable and cannot be simulated. There is no alternative to them, as a signaling device for transmitting in a decentralized process information about tastes, productive techniques, resources and so on; as a discovery procedure through which restless individuals, in pursuit of entrepreneurial profit, seek new ways of satisfying needs; and even, as the Prophet Marx himself acknowledged, as an arena of freedom and choice. Egalitarians know that command economies can only fail in comparison with market economies, and they know that, even if the market can in various ways be socialized, "market socialism" is, at best, an as yet ill-defined hope.

They also know that no economy can function on altruism and moral incentives alone, and that material incentives, and notably the profit motive, are indispensable to a well-functioning economy. Most work that needs to be done, and, in particular, entrepreneurial functions, must draw on motives that derive from individuals' pursuit of material advantage for themselves and for their families. They know, in short, that *any* feasible and viable economy must be based on market processes and material incentives, however



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controlled and supplemented in order to render them socially accountable,[15] thereby creating and reinforcing the very inequalities they earnestly seek to reduce.

The second major reason for skepticism that Egalitaria can be attained and, if so, maintained we may call the *communitarian constraint*. This is to be found, primarily, in the cultural sphere. Egalitarians hope that people can, at least when considering public and political issues, achieve a certain kind of abstraction from their own point of view and circumstances. Egalitarians hope that they can view anyone, including themselves, impartially, seeing everyone's life as of equal worth and everyone's well-being and freedom as equally valuable. John Rawls has modeled such a standpoint in his image of an "Original Position" where individuals reason behind a "veil of ignorance"; others have tried to capture it in other ways.

Yet Egalitarians must admit that this is not a natural attitude in the world in which we live and that it seems in increasingly many places to be becoming less and less so. Former Yugoslavs turn almost overnight into Serbs and Croats. It matters urgently to some Czechoslovaks that they are Slovaks and to some Canadians that they are Québécois. Even African Americans or Hispanic or Asian Americans are insisting on seeing themselves in politically correct ways. It seems that belonging to certain kinds of "encompassing groups" with cultures of self-recognition, and identifying and being identified as so belonging, is increasingly essential to many people's well-being.[16] But, to the extent that this is so, the "politics of equal dignity" that would treat individuals equally, irrespective of their group affiliations, is put in jeopardy.[17]

Consider the idea of "fraternity." Unlike "liberty" and "equality," which are conditions to be *achieved*, who your brothers are is determined by the past. You and they form a collectivity in contradistinction to the rest of humankind, and in particular to that portion of it that you and they see as sources of danger or objects of envy or resentment. The history of "fraternity" during the course of the French Revolution is instructive.[18] It began with a promise of universal brotherhood; soon it came to mean patriotism; and eventually the idea was used to justify militancy against external enemies and purges of enemies within. The revolutionary slogan *la fraternité ou la mort* thus acquired a new and ominous meaning, promising violence first against non-brothers and then against false brothers. For collective or communal identity always requires, as they say, an "other," every affirmation of belonging includes an explicit or implicit exclusion clause. The Egalitarians' problem is to render such exclusions harmless.

The problem is to attain a general acceptance of multiple identities that do not conflict. But how many situations in the present world are favorable to such an outcome? The least promising, and most explosive, seems to be that of formerly communist federal states containing peoples with historical enmities at different levels of economic development. The least unpromising, perhaps, are polyethnic societies composed mainly of various immigrant groups who demand the right freely to express their particularity within the economic and political institutions of the dominant culture. But there too, wherever that right is interpreted as a *collective* right to equal recognition, a threat to egalitarian outcomes is raised: that of treating individuals only or mainly as the bearers of their collective identities[19] and thus of building not Egalitaria but Communitaria.

Here, then, are two major reasons for doubting that Egalitaria can be realized anywhere in this world (let alone across it as a whole). They very naturally lead those impressed by them to take up anti-egalitarian political positions. Indeed, they constitute the two main sources of right-wing thinking today—libertarian and communitarian. Both point to severe limitations on the capacity of human beings to achieve that abstraction or impartial regard that could lead them to view all lives as equally valuable.[20] Both are sufficiently powerful and persuasive to convince reasonable people to reject egalitarian politics.



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How, in the light of this last fact, should we view human rights? I think it follows that the *list* of human rights should be kept both reasonably short and reasonably abstract. It should include the basic civil and political rights, the rule of law, freedom of expression and association, equality of opportunity, and the right to some basic level of material well-being, but probably no more. For only these have a prospect of securing agreement across the broad spectrum of contemporary political life, even though disagreement breaks out again once you ask how these abstract rights are to be made concrete: how the formal is to become real.

Who are the possessors of civil and political rights? Nationals? Citizens? Guest workers? Refugees? All who are residents within a given territory? Exactly what does the rule of law require? Does it involve equalizing access to legal advice and representation? Public defenders? The jury system? Equal representation of minorities on juries? The right to challenge jurors without cause? When are freedom of expression and association truly free? Does the former have implications for the distribution and forms of ownership of mass media and the modes and principles of their public regulation? Does the latter entail some form of industrial democracy that goes beyond what currently obtains? What must be equal for opportunities to be equal? Is the issue one of non-discrimination against an existing background of economic, social and cultural inequalities or is that background itself the field within which opportunities can be made more equal? What is the basic minimum? Should it be set low to avoid negative incentive effects? If so, how low? Or should there be a basic income for all, and, if so, should that include those who could but don't work, or don't accept work that is on offer? And how is a basic minimum level of material well-being to be conceived and measured—in terms of welfare, or income, or resources, or "level of living," or "basic capabilities," or in some other way?

To defend these human rights is to defend a kind of "egalitarian plateau" upon which such political conflicts and arguments can take place.[21] On the plateau, human rights are taken seriously on all sides, though there are wide and deep disagreements about what defending and protecting them involves. There are powerful reasons against abandoning it for any of the first four countries we have visited.

Yet the plateau is under siege from their armies. One of those armies flies a communitarian flag and practices "ethnic cleansing." It has already destroyed Mostar and many other places, and is currently threatening Kosovo and Macedonia. Right now it is laying siege to Sarajevo, slaughtering and starving men, women, and children, and raping women, only because they have the wrong collective identity. We are complicitly allowing this to go on, within the very walls of modern, civilized Europe. The barbarians are within the gates.

I believe that the principle of defending human rights requires an end to our complicity and appeasement: that we raise the siege of Sarajevo and defeat them by force. Only then can we resume the journey to Egalitaria, which, if it can indeed be reached at all, can only be reached from the plateau of human rights. □

## Notes

[1] See "*La Conception occidentale des droits de l'homme reforce le malentendu avec l'Islam*": interview with Mohamed Arkoun, *Le Monde* 15 March 1989, p. 2; and the essays in Adamantia Pollis and Peter Schwab (eds.), *Human Rights: Cultural and Ideological Perspectives* (New York: Praeger, 1979), esp. Ch. 1, pp. 14 sqq.

[2] See D.D. Raphael (ed.), *Political Theory and the Rights of Man* (London; MacMillan, 1967).

[3] See Elizabeth Kingdom, *What's Wrong with Rights? Problems for Feminist Politics of Law* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991).

[4] Reginald Herbold Green, *Human Rights, Human Conditions and Law—Some Explorations Towards Interaction* (Brighton: IDS, 1989), Discussion Paper no. 267.

[5] Karl Marx, "*Bruno Bauer, Die Fahigkeit der Heutigen Juden und Christen, frei zu werden*," translated in T.B. Bottomore (ed.), *Karl Marx: Early Writings* (London: Watts, 1963), p. 37.



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[6] Karl Marx, "Money," translated in Bottomore, *op. cit.*, pp. 193–94.

[7] Karl Marx, "Private Property and Communism," translated in Bottomore, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

[8] Jeremy Bentham, *Anarchical Fallacies,* reproduced in Jeremy Waldron (ed.), *Nonsense on Stilts: Bentham, Burke and Marx on the Rights of Man* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 53.

[9] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, reproduced in Waldron, *op. cit.*, pp. 105–6.

[10] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1981), pp. 65–67.

[11] Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works*, 2 Vols. (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), vol. 2, p. 25.

[12] Leon Trotsky, "Their Morals and Ours," *The New International,* June 1938, reproduced in *Their Morals and Ours: Marxist versus Liberal Views on Morality*. Four essays by Leon Trotsky, John Dewey and George Novack. Fourth edition, New York, Pathfinder Press, 1969.

[13] V.I. Lenin, "Speech at Third Komsomol Congress, 2 October 1920," in V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, 45 vols. (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House), vol. 31, pp. 291, 294.

[14] See Samuel Bowles, "What markets can—and cannot—do," *Challenge, The Magazine of Economic Affairs*, July–August 1991, pp. 11–16.

[15] See Diane Elson, "The Economics of a Socialized Market" in Robin Blackburn (ed.), *After the Fall, The Failure of Communism and the Future of Socialism* (London: Verso, 1991).

[16] See Avishai Margalit and Joseph Raz, "National Self-determination," *Journal of Philosophy* (87; 9, Sept. 1990), pp. 441–461.

[17] See *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition,"* an essay by Charles Taylor, with commentary by Amy Gutmann (editor), Steven C. Rockerfeller, Michael Walzer, and Susan Wolf (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992).

[18] See the entry on *"Fraternité"* (by Mona Ozouf) in François Furet and Mona Ozouf (eds.), *Dictionnaire critique de la Révolution française* (Paris, Flammarion, 1988), pp. 731–740.

[19] See Stephen L. Carter, *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby* (New York: Basic Books, 1991) and Will Kymlicka, "Liberalism and the Politization of Ethnicity," *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence* (4:2, July 1991); pp. 239–256. Kymlicka makes an interesting distinction between two kinds of cultural pluralism: one associated with multination states, the other with polyethnic immigrant societies.

[20] See Thomas Nagel, *Equality and Partiality* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[21] The idea of the egalitarian plateau is Ronald Dworkin's. See his "What is Equality? Part 1: Equality of Welfare; Part 2: Equality of Resources," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (10: 3–4, 1981), pp. 185–246, 283–345; "What is Equality? Part 3: the Place of Liberty," *Iowa Law Review* (73: 1, 1987), pp. 1–54; 'What is Equality? Part 4: Political Equality," *University of San Francisco Law Review* (22: 1, 1988), pp. 1–30; and *A Matter of Principle*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, Harvard University Press, 1985. See also the discussion in Will Kymlica, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990).

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**Harold Meyerson**

# CONFLICTED PRESIDENT, UNDEFINED PRESIDENCY

In the midst of last year's New York primary, Bill Clinton brought his stump speech to Wall Street. The Street was not impressed. "The problem with the past twelve years," Clinton told a noontime rally in the financial district, "is that Wall Street's gone up, and up, and up—the market's tripled in value over the last twelve years—while Main Street hasn't gone anywhere at all."

At which point, the crowd began to boo.

Let's freeze the frame right here, before Clinton has had a chance to respond, and consider his options. He has just upbraided the American speculator—as politically vulnerable a target as a Democrat could ever hope to affront. Being booed by this crowd only reinforces his populist bona fides; indeed, the press begins to wonder if this may be a calculated insult, like his attack on Sister Souljah and Jesse Jackson earlier in the year.

It isn't. "Not that I have anything against Wall Street doing well," Clinton interjects quickly—so quickly that the interval between the booing and Clinton's backtracking shall forever come to mind when I hear the word "millisecond." "I just want everyone to do as well as Wall Street did."

Six months into Bill Clinton's presidency, his Wall Street two-step still looms in memory, prefiguring the problems he has inflicted upon himself. He is the president who will not choose—populist or establishmentarian, outsider or insider, liberal or centrist. During the months leading up to his campaign, Clinton frequently remarked that he subscribed to *Washington Post* writer E.J. Dionne's argument that American politics was beset by false choices—between, for instance, the right to reproductive freedoms and support for family values. But after a half-year in the White House, it's clear that Clinton's aversion isn't just to false choices. It's to choices altogether.

The result has been what at best could be called a confusing presidency. Clinton has had some genuine achievements: family leave; the "motor-voter" registration act, which may bring millions of poorer and younger Americans into the electorate; the substitution of government for banks as a source—a cheaper source—of loans; and, above all, a massive increase in the Earned Income Tax Credit that will measurably reduce poverty among low-wage workers and their families. But there's an even longer list of programs that have been scaled back to symbolic dimensions only (worker retraining, national service, the stimulus), of policies negotiated down to near nothing (Bosnia, gays in the military), of appointments proferred and withdrawn (Zoe Baird, Lani Guinier). The zigs and the zags have created the impression of a president with no center, who promises first and extricates himself later. It is a tremendously damaging impression, but not in itself fatal.

What *would* be fatal—not just to Clinton but to the Democrats and the progressive project generally—is an inability to deliver on the one thing he was elected to do: fix the economy. Which is why Clinton's Wall Street stutter is so ominous: it illustrates not simply his aversion to choice but his reluctance to take on an economic establishment that stands athwart any



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serious effort to rebuild America and that despises the populist (and discreetly social democratic) politics he advanced in the '92 campaign.

Whatever misgivings the public may have on a range of Clinton policies, his polling has risen and fallen in tandem with public support for his economic plan. His position on gays in the military is broadly, if shallowly, supported; his raid on Iraq produced a brief upward bounce in his support; but as George Bush can attest, social and foreign policy are sideshows. What matters is economics—and the irony is that here, Clinton has nose-dived not for advancing the economics on which he successfully campaigned, but for espousing an economics he ridiculed during the primaries. What the Wall Street retreat foreshadowed was Bill Clinton's postelection transformation—not total, but disastrous withal—into Paul Tsongas.

## Let Clinton Be Tsongas

The transformation began with the establishment's rewriting of the election. "Congressional Democrats are about to teach Clinton something he should have learned from Paul Tsongas in last year's Democratic primaries and from Ross Perot in the general election," the *Washington Post*'s David Broder wrote in the early weeks of the Clinton presidency. "The voters don't want palliatives; they want serious and substantive action on the deficit."

I'm not sure what campaign Broder was following, but in the one I covered, Clinton attacked both Tsongas and Perot for focusing exclusively on the deficit and ignoring the decline in the public sector's investment in America's workers, students, industries, and physical resources. Indeed, Clinton was the first Democratic nominee in decades to offer broad-based programs; his biggest applause lines were invariably his statements of commitment to national health insurance, worker retraining, universal college loans, and the national service program. While he downplayed the middle-class tax cut soon after the New Hampshire primary, these universal entitlements remained the centerpiece of his campaign. They marked a deliberate break from the socially liberal and economically conservative approach of candidates Carter, Mondale, and Dukakis. And when Clinton won, he was entitled to the presumption that this reinvention of an activist government meant more to the public than the deficit obsessions of his defeated predecessors and rivals.

Clinton had acknowledged the deficit, too, but not enough to satisfy elite opinion in the markets, the editorial pages, and within his own nascent administration. With the election over, the elites appropriated the Perot vote to their own purposes. Dismissing out of hand the Perotistas' opposition to free trade, they labeled the bloc as a swing vote for deficit reduction only. From Broder to Brinkley, the election was redefined as a mandate for fiscal conservatism and shared sacrifice. By the time of the Little Rock economic summit in December, deficit reduction had joined public investment atop Clinton's agenda, and they got equal time in Clinton's February State of the Union address, the high point to date of his presidency.

Problem was, an agenda of deficit reduction and public investment was an agenda divided against itself. "Our program's a compound sentence that we connect with 'and' but that some people connect with 'but,' " one ranking administration official argues.

The press failed to connect it at all. The State of the Union the public saw and liked (Clinton's polling immediately soared) devoted twenty minutes to the investment agenda. The press coverage all but ignored it—documenting to the penny what a two-proctologist family in Provo, Utah, would owe in new taxes, but making no attempt to calculate, say, the savings that would result from taking banks out of the business of college loans or the aggregate effect of extending governmental loans to every qualified student. (How many more students, the papers could have pondered, would go to college?)

Ignored by the press, the investment side of Clintonomics was also scaled down by the demands of deficit reduction even before it reached the Hill. The $80 billion in infrastructure reconstruction Clinton spoke of on the



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campaign trail became $35 billion in the budget he submitted, and looks to come in at $20 billion when Congress gets through with it. The program to establish inner-city community development banks has been reduced from $850 million to just under $400 million, and Congress has yet to go to work on it. The national service program, conceived as a way for many thousands of young persons to repay college loans, will enroll between twenty thousand and twenty-five thousand students in its first year, now that it has survived a Republican filibuster.

Indeed, it's precisely the small scale of the program that enabled the Republicans to block it for a time. The proposal is one of Clinton's most popular—but unless it affects a significant number of people, there won't be much popular outcry if it's derailed. That was the lesson of the ill-fated $16 billion stimulus package. "We lobbied as an institution," one veteran union lobbyist comments, "but it was too small for our members to involve themselves—or even notice it."

In short, Clintonomics has become self-subverting. But then, it emerges from a self-subverting administration.

### A White House Divided

At the center of the administration—"controlling the numbers, which is a major source of power," says one White House insider—are the deficit hawks: Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen, Office of Management and Budget Director Leon Panetta, and Associate Director Alice Rivlin, and Director of the National Economic Council Robert Rubin. "Panetta is Tsongas with a better personality," says an administration intimate. "Rivlin is Tsongas with a worse one."

Like Tsongas, Panetta is a converted Republican—driven from the party by its rightward drift on social issues, but not now or ever remotely a Keynesian. (In the mid-seventies, Panetta was the one member of California's Democratic congressional delegation to oppose the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment Bill.) Rubin comes to the administration from the investment banking house of Goldman Sachs. White House officials say that within the limits of such spending as the budget permits, he favors liberal, even inner-city, priorities. They also say that no one is more responsible for those limits being there in the first place than Rubin, who opposed a more generous stimulus package and who's argued against a more expansive (and expensive) program of national health insurance. "The original sin of this administration," says one self-proclaimed New Democrat more accustomed to disparaging liberals, "was the decision to reassure the financial community by appointing the establishment types—members of the nomenklatura."

The economic progressives in Clinton's entourage were relegated to secondary positions. Robert Reich in the Department of Labor and Laura Tyson at the Council of Economic Advisors have emerged as the foremost advocates for Clinton's investment agenda. But they've been unable to overcome the inside clout of Bentsen, Rubin, Panetta and Rivlin. Still other key progressive advisers from the campaign barely made it into the administration at all. Senior policy adviser Ira Magaziner had no position until Hillary Rodham Clinton insisted he head up the health care task force; public policy professor Derek Shearer was relegated to a position in the Commerce Department (which he's since left).

There are four other loose tendencies on the administration's domestic and economic side, but of these, two—the Democratic Leadership Council types and the standard-issue liberals—define themselves chiefly around social policies of race and entitlements and leave macroeconomics alone. The third, Gary Hart alumni, still seem to have no beef—no distinct policy perspectives nor animus against any other group. That leaves the "populists" as the only other players in the economic wars. The most prominent populists are Clinton's political consultants—James Carville, Paul Begala, pollster Stanley Greenberg, Democratic National Chair John Wilhelm—and junior alter ego George Stephanopolous. (It is an index of



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the Democrats' decline that their administration's leading populists are those members of their elite paid to monitor and shape public opinion.)

In a series of administration policy debates, the populists have tended to line up with Reich (on the stimulus) and Hillary (on an ambitious national health insurance plan) against the deficit hawks. On the budget, they argued that taxing people with annual incomes under $100,000—a proposal originally slated to bring in 25 percent of the new revenue under the administration's budget—was a major political mistake. During the debate, according to one source close to the populists, the two groups put forth diametrically opposed perspectives on how the middle class lives. "The Tsongasites really don't see the middle class as a victim for the past twenty years," he says. "They think they've been coddled. They're into pain and suffering. Without the middle-class taxes, the package would have lost the Tsongasites' support."

The White House political apparat has itself taken a more centrist turn with the appointment of David Gergen as presidential counselor. As Rubin reassured Wall Street, Gergen reassures K Street, the permanent government of Washington lobbyists and pundits. By bringing Gergen aboard, Clinton has struck a Faustian bargain. The White House knows how to talk to reporters now; in return, it has placed the most establishmentarian functionary in America at its presumably populist heart. Gergen's faith in elites seems boundless—he's the man who believed the Watergate tapes would exonerate Nixon.

However much Gergen may personify the bipartisan center of American politics, he personifies even more the bipartisan center of Beltway careerism. It's hard to think of anybody who by career and temperament would be more estranged from a typical Perot voter. "Democrats will only reach these voters," pollster Stan Greenberg has recently written, "if they can position themselves as outsiders against the establishment." But in politics as well as economics, the establishment and its ideologues pervade the administration.

### Perot: The Misread Middle

An oxymoronic political strategy underpins both the primacy given the deficit and the ascent of figures like Panetta and Gergen: establishmentarian populism. The Compleat Perotista, according to the estab-pops, cares mainly about deficit reduction and social moderation—concerns that coincide, quite amazingly, with the preoccupations of the Beltway establishment. Were this the case, then a lasting realignment would involve little more than Clinton turning himself into a Tex-Mex Tsongas.

But to anyone who has actually seen a Perot rally or looked at the demographics of his support, this is a wildly fanciful reading. Throughout the '92 campaign, the Perotistas had more in common with Jerry Brown's and Pat Buchanan's supporters than they had with Tsongas's or anyone else's: they were economic nationalists, raging against elites—corporate, political, labor, media. They reviled government but were light-years from prescribing laissez-faire policies. "Let's just do it," Perot was given to saying, and his supporters were the action faction of American politics.

This summer, the first two in-depth polls of Perot supporters have been released, and have exploded any lingering notion that deficit reduction is the way to the Perot supporters' hearts—or to a Democratic realignment. Indeed, a Stan Greenberg survey for the DLC shows that the deficit ranks well beneath the economy, and no higher than health care and jobs, in the concerns of Perot voters—and that the quarter of Perotistas who singled out the deficit were more often well off and Republican than the three-quarters who didn't. The deficit matters to Perot voters, but chiefly as a symbol of government's incapacity to perform.

And Perot voters crave performance. A *Los Angeles Times* poll showed that over half favored "an activist government that has an obligation to help people when they are in trouble." Only 26 percent of Republicans felt the same. Both polls made clear that Perot supporters, like Democrats, favored governmental activism, but believed, like Republicans, that government is incapable of deliver-



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ing. In the parlance of political scientists, they were frustrated, enraged, *farmisht*. What they chiefly want government to do is to address the nation's—and their own—shaky economic condition. "What will matter to them most," says Greenberg, "is jobs and health care." Which suggests that the way to align Clinton's Perot periphery with his Democratic core isn't so much deficit reduction as economic investment.

It also suggests that the obstructionism of Bob Dole and the Congressional Republicans may misfire. If gridlock is as irksome to the Perotistas as the deficit (and if some of them fume at the deficit precisely because it deepens the gridlock), then GOP filibusters and Dole's odes to inaction aren't likely to entice many of these swing voters. In fact, they haven't. Polling by Public Opinion Strategies (a GOP firm) over the past six months shows that while the percentage of voters identifying themselves as Democrats has declined from 41 to 34 percent, the percentage identifying themselves as Republicans has remained anchored in the 30 percent to 32 percent range. Beyond its decision to thwart Clinton at every turn, the right remains as beleaguered and divided on strategy as—well, as the left.

### Tell Me Where The Left Has Gone

It's the frustrated and alienated—not the left or the right—who are filled with passionate intensity these days, whose voices dominate talk radio and the calls to congressional offices. I'm talking about this one afternoon with the administrative assistant to a liberal senator from one of the largest states. "Where's the left?" I ask him.

"You tell me where the left has gone!" he explodes. "I don't hear from unions! I hear from blacks on Lani Guinier! I hear from gays on the military ban! I get more NAFTA mail from Perot voters than from union members. *No one* has written this office demanding higher taxes on corporations."

He has answered his own outburst: the left has gone particularistic, lost its center, broken into tribes. Bill Clinton has introduced the first program in decades to move America in a mildly more equitable direction, but during those decades, the institutional forces for greater equity, unions in particular, have dwindled to virtual insignificance. "Even in contrast to the Carter years," says one longtime Washington liberal activist, "we don't have a liberal political movement with a clear set of goals for this administration."

As the Clinton Administration gears up for its battle over health insurance, it has had to grapple with the disintegration of the class-based left it needs to campaign for its program. Its initial, commendable, impulse was to plot a mobilizing campaign of almost CIO-like dimensions—one that could set in place a national activist structure for future campaigns as well. At the direction of DNC Chair Wilhelm, political organizer Celia Fisher and Citizen Action founder Heather Booth were hired to head up the drive. Now, though, the powers that be are having second thoughts about the campaign. "The question will be decided by the legislation itself," says the Senate aide. "Do you sell a health care program that will make a small change, make everyone a little happy, bend no one out of shape, excite no one, and pass easily up here? Or do you take on the special interests, make it tougher up here on the Hill, but really energize the grass roots? The fundamental problem isn't organizational. As is usually the case with this administration, it's strategic."

### Some Strategies

In the coming year, there will be a number of economic policies on which Bill Clinton will have to make some strategic choices; I look at five of them here. Most, though not all, present him the option of choosing an investment strategy over one of deficit reduction—and, should he take that option, of generating jobs and strengthening both the Democratic base and its ties to the Perot bloc. But these are not options he can take without drawing the fire of the financial community and the Beltway punditocracy.

There's no guarantee, of course, that Clinton would be able to move these policies through



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Congress any more successfully than he has his current agenda. Some, like a more fully developed industrial policy, may have a good chance of enactment. Even the ones that wouldn't get through, though, would offer him a more compelling platform with which to campaign against Congress than the mish-mash he brought to the Hill earlier this year.

**First: A stimulus package in the 1994–5 budget.** This is the first recovery in American economic history to drag the economy downward—and it could drag Clinton down with it. Even worse, at a moment when factory orders are dropping and the Conference Board predicts an anemic 1 percent job growth for the second half of the year, Congress is poised to enact a deficit-reducing budget that can only cost more jobs. The administration is circulating a document that claims its budget will in the fullness of time create jobs, but this runs so counter to Keynesian verities that even Republican economist Herbert Stein has written that he can find no theory supporting the notion that this plan could increase employment.

In supporting this budget, many congressional Democrats are whistling past the graveyard: their own Joint Economic Committee has produced a study that shows it to be contractionary, but a number of Democrats have suspended their judgment and bought in to the argument that deficit reduction will lead to lower interest rates, which in turn will produce growth and jobs. "It's a risky course of action," says California representative Howard Berman, "counter-intuitive, actually. It's certainly not the JFK-FDR prescription for recovery. And it's jobs, not the deficit, that loom largest in the minds of the voters." But like his colleagues, Berman saw no credible alternative to supporting the budget.

Is there a credible alternative next year, though? Suppose it's winter and unemployment still hangs at 7 percent, with the only new jobs part-time ones—not a particularly far-fetched scenario. One Washington journalist swears that some congressional Democrats are playing the game of making-it-worse-to-make-it-better: going along with this year's budget in the expectation that it will push a teetering economy just far enough over the edge to pave the way for a stimulus in next year's budget. But a liberal economic consultant sees no such light at the tunnel's end. "We're looking in vain for one administration insider who is articulating the jobs concern, the need to create jobs next year," he says. "By making the argument that deficit reduction is the way to growth Clinton has trapped himself. How high does unemployment have to rise, or how long does it have to hang at 7 percent, before Clinton is allowed to move off that position?"

**Second: Industrial policy/defense conversion.** One of the less contentious forms of stimulus is industrial policy—partly because it helps develop crucial and innovative industries, partly because it's a jobs program for skilled workers and professionals, who are nowhere so politically marginal as inner-city youths working on federally funded summer jobs. From Lyndon Johnson through Reagan and Bush, defense spending was the Sunbelt's industrial policy of choice. Clinton owes his victory in some key Sunbelt states, California above all, to Bush's suicidal insistence on a laissez-faire non-response to the decimation of defense, and his own vague commitments to planned conversion. But there's not much in Clinton's current budget that translates his rhetoric into programs.

There may be political space for more such programs in next year's. Jane Harman, a first-term Democratic member of Congress from L.A.'s South Bay area, represents a Republican district that until last November hadn't sent a Democrat to Congress in decades. The South Bay may be home to a greater concentration of aerospace than any other congressional district, and its residents, says Harman, "include unemployed workers who are heavily white collar. The chief concern is jobs, of course, then the decline of local services—police, schools, libraries—and then deficit reduction. There's enormous interest in defense reinvestment programs, in dual-use technology ventures." There's growing interest throughout Congress for public investment in



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new high-tech ventures: New York Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan is pushing to build Maglev trains from the airports to Manhattan. The problem, says one Capitol Hill lobbyist for an industrial union, is that "the policy isn't real enough yet. If real funds for light rail and electric cars were put into the next budget, there'd be support for them—and not only from Democratic members."

**Third: Taking benefits out of play.** Increasingly, the problem for the American economy isn't just that we continue to lose jobs in the midst of a recovery, but that the jobs created aren't nearly as good as the ones lost. The first nation in history to produce a majority middle class is now producing an onslaught of contingent jobs—the current term-of-art for independent contractors, part-timers both voluntary and (increasingly) not. Just five years ago, one in four American jobs was contingent. Today, one in three is. The American economy's response to the globalization of markets has been to turn us into a nation of temps.

The primary advantage that hiring a temp confers on an employer, of course, is that the employer avoids having to pay increasingly expensive benefits, health insurance above all. The most effective way to curtail temping, then, and to slow the rush toward a two-tier work force, is to take benefits out of the realm of employer discretion altogether and vest them in the state. In those dimly remembered days when unions had power (the economy's glory years, the forties through the seventies), they "took wages out of play"—that is, negotiated industry-wide contracts that enabled companies to improve productivity and efficiency but not at workers' expense. What American workers need now (and what an economy with chronically diminished purchasing power needs as well) is for the state to take benefits out of play. Decoupling health insurance or vacations from the realm of company discretion, officials in Reich's Labor Department are arguing, would enable firms to hire more full-time workers and give workers the freedom to change jobs without fear of losing their benefits.

Each of these three strategies—nationalized benefits, a targeted industrial policy and Stimulus II—would force Clinton to restart the establishment/populist conflict that arose over this year's budget. In each instance, the economic and political case against greater public investment and in favor of deficit reduction comes down to not wanting to alarm the markets in general and Alan Greenspan in particular. It's not much of a case.

Economically, without the kind of job creation and industrial renewal fostered by the investment agenda, it's ludicrous to think lower interest rates will reverse America's industrial decline. Cheaper credit will not create jobs when even the most profitable companies, swimming in cash, are continuing to downsize. Nor are lower interest rates sufficient to boost consumer purchasing power in an economy than continues to shed jobs.

If the economics of deficit reduction are shaky, the politics are worse. The constituency for such universal programs as a fully funded national service program or national health includes both middle class and poor. The constituency for deficit reduction includes both middle class and rich. Investment economics bring together the Democratic coalition; deficit reduction reunites the Republican. Nonetheless, the constraints of this year's budgetary plan make a 1994 increase in public investment difficult for Clinton, save in the special case of national health. "He's defined success over the next eighteen months as deficit reduction," says a liberal economist, "and that has to mean slower job growth. It's the opposite of what he needs."

**Fourth: The smarter (unionized?) workplace.** Another strategy that Clinton is pursuing lies outside the realm of fiscal policy and therefore doesn't pit cutters against investors. It's directed at improving productivity by increasing worker training, workplace participation and cooperation, worker incomes, and—if nobody minds and if nobody's looking—unionization.

The question here is how much Clinton and Reich want to push the unionization part—the



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linchpin of workplace reform, but politically the most perilous. They know the literature, know that the United States is regularly out-produced by the more secure, highly trained and highly unionized workers of Germany and Scandinavia. They also know that American business has all but broken the union movement here and that the continued globalization of the economy means the continual diminution of U.S. unions' power.

What's emerging is a strategy that makes an explicit case for cooperative worker-management relations—and an implicit (at times, barely visible) one for unions. The just-completed Chicago conference on the workplace is the first in a series of events that will showcase the new industrial harmony—to a business sector that seems steadily more indifferent to such issues. The administration's industrial relations commission, chaired by former Labor Secretary John Dunlop, has been charged with rethinking such matters as workers' rights, including the Big Question: does America need a reform of labor law so that workers can once more organize with legal protection? It's no secret that many commission members favor greater workplace unionization; what's not clear is whether they can persuade any significant business groups to join them.

Some sources close to the Labor Department argue that the commission is labor's and the administration's way to vamp until business is ready—if that day ever comes. If it doesn't, there's almost no indication that either Clinton or Reich wants to push the issue. Neither one has had much experience with unions, and both have been so wary about expressing any admiration for unions' role in industrial democracies that they seem to hold as their national ideal a union-free social democracy.

"Reich is pro-union; but he's reluctant to say anything more than that the playing field between management and workers should be leveled," one source close to the Labor Department comments. "He's proceeding very carefully." So carefully, in fact, that in a recent *New York Times* op-ed column, Reich contrasted the American economy's pattern of low-wage job creation with Germany's pattern of high-wage job retention and didn't mention unions even once. One of America's two or three leading liberal theorists, serving as secretary of labor in a Democratic administration, is reluctant not merely to support unions but even to acknowledge them as a historic fact.

We're way past the point where socialism is the ideology that dare not speak its name. Now, unions can no longer be spoken of in polite society.

**Fifth: Globalized Keynesianism.** The final economic strategy Clinton needs to pursue is an internationalist response to such changes as the demise of unions and the decline of living standards throughout the advanced industrialized world. From the thirties through the seventies, Western governments used instruments of national politics—unions, social legislation, fiscal policy, and public investment—to foster broad-based prosperity. Thereafter, the increased globalization of capital stripped from nations much of their control over their own economies.

Clinton has come to power at the very moment that capitalism is both triumphant as an ideology and staggering as an economics. It has vanquished communism and weakened social democracy. Paradoxically—call it the revenge of the dialectic—it needed both. Communism, particularly in the United States, provided the rationale for public investment (on weapons—but, to paraphrase Keynes, a buck's a buck). Social democracy ensured that the wealth created under capitalism was distributed widely enough to guarantee demand. Today, public investment lacks the transcendent purpose provided by the cold war; and purchasing power has eroded broadly across the West—through reduced incomes in the United States and chronic joblessness in Western Europe.

The crisis isn't merely economic, either. On matters economic, all politics are national—and strikingly ineffectual in the brave new world market. It's not that the world's leaders are pygmies, as the news magazines lamented during the recent Tokyo meeting of the G-7 powers. It's that national politics can no longer deliver as it did in the post–World War II era.



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That is why the same bewildering phenomenon is popping up throughout Europe, North America, and Japan—a decline in the fortunes of the governing party without a concomitant rise in the opposition. Clinton sinks, but the Republicans stay anchored to the bottom of the polls; the governing parties in Japan and Italy die without a credible national opposition being born; conservatives, social democrats, and socialists all decline throughout Western Europe; voter turnout is down throughout the West (except, for once, in the United States). Where national politics has ceased to deliver, it really doesn't matter much which national party governs.

If the world cannot be changed, it can perhaps be kept away. In the absence of politics, we get purity: regional parties in some of the western states, nativist pressures in all of them. The economy has not only triumphed over politics and democracy. It is imperiling tolerance and social cohesion as well.

What's required to restore some balance to this equation is a new coordination among the major industrialized countries. In Tokyo, Clinton moved as far as the balance within his own administration would allow. He called for a meeting of finance and labor ministers to coordinate job policies—though by this, he meant the kind of workplace and labor-market policies that he can pursue without increasing public investment substantially. It was an innovative but inadequate step forward: what the global economy needs is a transnational policy of public investment, job creation, and a managed trade policy that seeks to level upward such less-developed nations as Mexico. Clinton is the only head of state who could lead the charge on these policies. Except, they're not policies his administration has agreed to nationally, let alone globally.

What we know from the '92 campaign is that this is a charge Clinton is capable of leading. At his best, he fused a middle-class populism with a rhetoric of national renewal—but it was a fusion made possible by his emphasis on public investment. He might be able to do it again—if he can make some choices.

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**Campaign Speech, New York, 1936**

By contrast, let's close with Franklin Roosevelt, who at the moment of his greatest triumph went out of his way to offend the very powers with whom Clinton finds it hard to break. The last rally of the 1936 campaign brought Franklin Roosevelt to Madison Square Garden, where, three days before the most decisive popular landslide in American political history, he sought to draw a new political alignment. He was referring, he told the crowd, to "old enemies: business and financial monopoly, speculation, reckless banking, class antagonism . . . government by organized money." Then, to the crowd's rising roar, he continued: "Never before in all our history have these forces been so united against one candidate as they stand today. They are unanimous in their hatred for me—and I welcome their hatred!"

All right, it's an unfair comparison. This is Roosevelt gloating in anticipation of the kind of majority Clinton has never come close to; he remains a minority president. In less decisive moments, Roosevelt was every bit as capable of equivocation as Clinton. (Actually, he was a lot better at it than Clinton.) But even allowing for the vagaries of political fortune, there remains a question of character that in this instance is a profoundly political question: whose hatred does Bill Clinton welcome? Is this peace-keeper from a dysfunctional family capable of welcoming hatred at all?

Politics is rotting; choices impend. It is time to draw some lines, welcome some hatred, return to Wall Street, and let the boos roll on.□



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**Robert Dahl**

# THE ILLS OF THE SYSTEM

## Do We Need Basic Constitutional Changes?

Thanks to the election of Bill Clinton, American are going to discover whether a change in leadership can cure the ills of their political system. Are the inadequacies in governing that have given rise to so much discontent mainly a product, as many people think, of divided government combined with divisive and inept presidential leadership? If so, it would be hard to imagine, at this point at least, a more promising remedy than a president with Clinton's energy and political skills working with a Congress of his own party that is likely to support much of what he proposes. In four years, then, we ought to know whether this combination is enough, or whether our difficulties in governing have causes too deep even for President Clinton and a supportive Congress to overcome.

Clinton and the Democratic Congress face an unusually heavy challenge for many reasons, but the one I want to describe here is the challenge posed by a new political order that has emerged in the United States over the past thirty years or so. Although the new order retains a seamless continuity with the one it displaced, in its present form it constitutes something so new that journalists, commentators, scholars, and ordinary citizens are still struggling to understand it. Perhaps Robert Strauss, the very epitome of the informed Washington insider, said it best in a comment to Alan Gotlieb, the Canadian ambassador, in the early 1980s: "The difference between Congress now and fifteen years ago is the difference between chicken-salad and chicken-shit. The words sound the same, but that's about all they do. The Congress is a completely different world from what it was fifteen years ago. If you don't understand that point, you'll understand nothing about Washington."

I don't know precisely what Strauss had in mind, but surely one of the main features of the new order is that although political *fragmentation* has increased, capacities for political *integration* have declined. On the one hand, government policies are made in response to a greater number and variety of conflicting and substantially independent interest groups. On the other hand, political institutions for encouraging these conflicting interest groups to negotiate not only with one another but also with political actors who are more representative of the general public, in search of mutually beneficial policies, are in some important respects weaker than before.

An outsider's experience may help us to grasp the nature and extent of fragmentation in the American political system. When Gotlieb arrived in Washington in 1981 as Canada's ambassador, he was familiar with all the standard rules of proper ambassadorial behavior. He had every reason to assume that if he did not yet understand Washington well enough to follow the rules properly, he soon would. After all, like many well-informed Canadians he was probably about as familiar with American political life as are most Americans. He was also a sharp observer and a quick learner.

What he learned was that none of the rules formulated over several centuries of diplomatic conduct in capitals around the world applied to



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Washington. Consider one particularly illuminating example. Surely it would make sense for a diplomat to design a grand strategy for promoting his country's interests. Not so in Washington. Instead, as he tells us in his account of his stay here, a diplomat "must grasp the fact that every issue involves its own microstrategy and that every microstrategy is unique."* Gotlieb came to see Washington as a mass of moving charged particles, some more powerful than others but all with power of some kind. Even the president is just another particle, though one with a charge that changes in magnitude from time to time. Senators, representatives, columnists, congressional staffers, lobbyists, lawyers, even hostesses are all a part of a "system" that seems to lack any well-defined systemic properties.

Gotlieb is not the only observer to remark on the peculiarly fragmented character of the present-day American political order—or should we say disorder? The political scientist Hugh Heclo emphasizes the difference between the political world Americans live in today and that of thirty years ago. Back then the American political world was "a regime of establishments." There was a congressional establishment, a foreign policy establishment, a labor establishment, a black establishment, a Social Security establishment, a Democratic party establishment, and so on. The regime that has replaced the old world of establishments is "much more open, fragmented, self-critical, nondeferential, and fluid in its attachments." The new regime is everywhere. Its main features "have been increasingly true of Congress internally, of presidential relations with Congress, of interest groups and their coalitions, of parties, political campaigns, and of voters' reactions to this passing parade."

Meanwhile, the capacity of our political parties to integrate diverse interests has dramatically declined. Parties can help to compose differences in demands at two levels: in nominations and elections (an unusually lengthy process in the United States) and at the policy-making level, particularly within the legislature and between legislature and executive. Authorities on political parties have long observed that the stronger the party organizations are in elections and legislatures, the weaker is the influence of interest groups, and conversely. (Causation probably runs both ways.) In nominating candidates and enacting legislation American parties have always tended to be somewhat less centralized and cohesive than European parties. But during the last several decades, at the *electoral* level they have become more fragmented than ever before. As Alan Ehrenhalt has observed, local, state, and national party organizations have dissolved into loosely attached collections of individual political entrepreneurs who have their own organizations, agendas, and finances. The result is precisely what many political activists and entrepreneurs of the last two decades intended: a weakening in the power of party leaders and an increase in their own.

One cause for the dissolution of parties and for an increase in fragmentation and political entrepreneurship is the need for elected officials to raise money to cover the staggering rise in the costs of their campaigns. This makes them less dependent on their party organizations and more on making themselves attractive to individuals and PACs (Political Action Committees) with highly particularistic interests. This development has been so fully discussed that it is unnecessary for me to expand on it further. However, I can hardly overstate its importance, for until the problem of campaign finance is solved it will continue to strengthen the centrifugal tendencies in the political system.

The weakening of integrating forces in the political system was further amplified during the Bush administration by the failure of the White House, whether from ineptitude, indifference, or intent, to provide leadership capable of offsetting the fragmenting thrust of interest-group politics. As Ambassador Gotlieb discovered, the president had become only one more charged particle in the vast field of American political life.

What then are the causes of this new system?

* *I'll be with you in a minute, Mr. Ambassador: The Education of a Canadian Diplomat in Washington* (University of Toronto Press, 1991).



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What are its consequences? And what, if anything, can and should be done to reshape it?

**Separation of Powers**. Among the basic elements of the older system on which the newer has been built, the most obvious is the strong constitutional separation of powers between executive and legislature. The other English-speaking democracies, all the European democracies, and Japan have rejected this distinctively American solution. Most possess parliamentary systems of one kind or another. A few, of which the most obvious is the French Fifth Republic, have created hybrid arrangements, mixtures of parliamentary and presidential systems. With the exception of Costa Rica, however, in none of the older democratic systems is executive authority constitutionally lodged exclusively in a president chosen (in effect) by popular vote.

What constitutional separation of powers builds into the very center of government are pluralism, rivalry, competition, the representation in the executive and legislative branches of differing and possibly divergent interests, and, as a consequence, the strong likelihood that president and Congress will press for conflicting policies. What is missing, because the framers did not provide for it, is a constitutional process for readily resolving these conflicts.

Given favorable circumstances, however, it is sometimes possible for the centrifugal forces at the system's center not only to be contained but even well focused. Strong and astute presidential leadership, relatively unified political parties, a president and congressional majorities drawn from the same party, or, if not, willing to negotiate compromises, their advocacy of policies supported by majority opinion—all these have served at times to strengthen the integrative capacities of president and Congress. But whenever these conditions are lacking, fragmentation tends to increase.

The chances that these conditions may be lacking are considerably increased by one direct result of the constitutional separation of powers: the possibility of divided government, when the president is of one party while one or both houses of congress have majorities from the other party. Since World War II, divided government has been the norm, not the exception: during that period of almost half a century, the president and both houses of Congress have been of the same party only about one-third of the time.

The main drawback of divided government is not, as conventional wisdom holds, that it necessarily produces deadlock. David Mayhew has shown that from 1947–1990 the number of major laws enacted was no lower on average in periods of divided government than in periods of unified government. Nor have major congressional investigations been fewer during periods of unified government. On his showing, the difference in legislative output and investigations is a wash. Further evidence is provided by Paul Peterson and Jay Greene, who, after systematically examining "the degree of conflict displayed in the questioning of executive branch witnesses testifying before congressional committees and subcommittees" from 1947–1990, found "little evidence that divided government, by itself, adds to political controversy."

However, if deadlock is to be avoided during periods of divided government, the president, congressional leaders, and majorities in House and Senate must all be willing and able to negotiate mutually acceptable compromises. When a president's ambitions induce him to follow a strategy of vetoing major legislation backed by the other party in Congress, then the most likely result is indeed a deadlock, as the last two years of the Bush administration vividly demonstrated.

**Interest-Group Politics**. Along with the underlying structure of separation of powers, another longstanding characteristic of American political life helps to provide a fertile soil for fragmentation. Interest-group politics is not new: it is the standard mode of American politics. Lest I be misunderstood, let me add that I believe—though I will not undertake to support the view here—that in a large-scale democratic system encompassing great diversities among its citizens, interest-group politics is not merely more feasible, indeed



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inevitable, but also fundamentally more desirable than the illusory alternative of a republic in which virtuous citizens and virtuous leaders strive only for "the public good." In any case, despite popular myths to the contrary, interest-group politics is as old as the republic itself.

To be sure, the classical republican tradition that was still dominant among revolutionary leaders had insisted that citizens and leaders alike should be animated by a desire to achieve not simply their own interests but the public good. Along with many other well-established conceptions of good government, however, older ideas about civic virtue and the danger of "factions" fell victim to the sweeping changes in outlook among Americans that followed upon the revolution. Although the ancient notion of civic virtue did not wholly die out in political rhetoric, the pursuit of self and group interests became predominant in both the language and practice of American politics. Indeed, among the characteristics of Americans that most impressed Tocqueville when he visited the country in 1831 and 1832 were their belief in the virtues of enlightened self-interest and their extraordinary propensity for forming associations to achieve almost almost any purpose, including, of course, political goals. Tocqueville's "associations" were in fact our "interest groups."

In recent decades, however, both the number and variety of interest groups with significant influence over policy-making in Washington have greatly increased. This increase can be accounted for, in part at least, by two new factors. The enhanced effectiveness of direct mail solicitation made it much easier for organizations to gain members and, even more important, money. In fact, probably most "members" of politically influential organizations limit their participation entirely to making financial contributions from time to time. In addition, broad changes in attitudes and concerns among sizable groups of citizens—those concerned with women, the environment, education, and the elderly, for example—enabled older organizations to expand and new ones to form. From 1960 onward "citizen groups" like these (as distinguished from the older "occupational groups") underwent a period of rapid growth.

Although popular and journalistic rhetoric inveighed against the rising influence of "narrow-interest lobbies" and "single-issue interest groups," the new organizations are no narrower than many of the older ones and greatly broaden the spectrum of interests that exercise influence on public policy.

The increase in the number and diversity of interest groups has not been accompanied, however, by a corresponding increase in the strength of integrating institutions. On the contrary, as we have seen, the integrating capacity of American parties during campaigns and elections has drastically declined, placing a still heavier burden on the White House and Congress. Whether they can satisfactorily discharge this burden remains a question that only time can answer.

**Complexity**. Although an intensification of these enduring characteristics of American politics helps to account for the much of the fragmentation characteristic of the new political order, a much less noticed factor is a substantial rise in the complexity of public matters. Complexity helps to generate new interest groups with influence over public policy and yet fails to strengthen the integrative capacities of political institutions.

One obvious cause of complexity is the expanded role of government, which has increased the sheer number of issues on which a well-informed citizen needs some understanding. And almost every issue area, whether foreign affairs, agriculture, health care, poverty, economic growth and stability, taxation, immigration, or the environment, is large and complicated enough by itself to daunt even the best informed. What is worse, each of these broad areas is made up of many specific issues, most of which are also very complicated.

The dynamics of complexity help to spawn a whole new set of influential actors: the specialists or experts who now occupy powerful positions in political life. Complexity makes specialization advantageous, even inevitable. With the knowledge specialists create or transmit, they in turn generate complexity—



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which requires more experts. Whatever they may claim, however, specialists are not neutral, purely apolitical purveyors of knowledge; they are political actors with their own views and agendas. To pursue their agendas, they need and usually acquire some measure of autonomy and authority. Because experts are difficult to control without expertise, like lawyers, experts create a demand for the services of other experts. And so it goes.

Though the dynamics of complexity are clearest in the executive branch, where its results are most often subject to severe criticism, it operates throughout all parts of government (and, it is worth adding, almost certainly in business as well). Consider what the late Alexander Bickel called "the least dangerous branch." In 1840 the federal judiciary employed a total of about a hundred and fifty persons, including judges. Today the number is around twenty-four thousand. Or reflect on what has happened to our national legislature. Confronted by complexity and a formidable array of expertise in the executive branch, Congress responded by creating its own groups of specialists. At one time, these were mainly the members of congressional committees, subcommittees, and special committees, that is, the elected members of the House and Senate. But to assist them in coping with the growing complexity of public policies (as well as the demands of their constituents, it should be said) the elected members increased their staffs in their own offices and in the committees. In fact, the number of Senate employees per Senator now exceeds what was once the total membership of the entire U.S. Congress. In 1840 a Congress of 223 representatives and 52 senators employed a total staff of 57; today 435 representatives employ over 12,000 people and 100 Senators more than 7,000. Measured by its employees, the Congress is larger than 99 percent of all business firms in this country.

The growth of staffs has been particularly great in recent years. No doubt the size and importance of congressional staff contribute to the difference between Congress now and a generation ago that prompted Strauss's metaphor. Charles Peters attributes the recent increase to the aftermath of Vietnam, Watergate, and the Iran-contra affair, as a result of which "Congress no longer trusted the executive branch to provide it with accurate information."

The expansion in the size and importance of staff means that influence in Congress is no longer lodged only in its members. Staff members constitute another disparate set of political actors with their own agendas, considerable independence, and substantial influence. One staff member who was elected to the House after eight years as a Senatorial aide commented that when people asked him how he felt about being elected to Congress, "I told them I never thought I'd give up that much power voluntarily." In one survey, Peters reports, lobbyists "rated congressional staffs as their number-one lobbying target (by contrast, the White House ranked sixth)."

Let me now turn to some of the consequences of the new order.

**Incomprehensibility**. One of the most striking is its sheer incomprehensibility. Americans must now cope with a political system that works in opaque and mysterious ways that probably no one adequately understands. We should not be altogether surprised that even unusually well-informed foreigners are baffled by the system. Nelson Polsby recounts how a question put to him by a foreign "political leader who was—and is—well educated, well informed about American politics in general, indeed a frequent and a welcome visitor to America, and favorably disposed to the United States . . . left no doubt that there were structural features of the American political system that either had not come to his attention or that he had misunderstood." Even an astute, experienced, and well-connected observer like Ambassador Gotlieb was driven to the conclusion that "the particular process by which a decision is reached in Washington is often so complex and mysterious that it defies comprehension." He quotes his British counterpart, Sir Nicholas Henderson, as saying that "anyone who tells you that he understands how a particular decision was made in Washington is either a fool or a liar."



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If unusually well-informed foreigners do not understand how the system works, can we reasonably expect ordinary American citizens to do so? "Only detailed knowledge of the wiring diagram of the American national legislature," Nelson Polsby writes, "can possibly resolve uncertainty about how to weigh any particular Congressional manifestation of opinion. . . . Distributions of members on committees and subcommittees by age, by ideology, and by constituency, whether homogeneous or diverse in each dimension, will yield up different patterns of policy-making and indeed different substantive policies from subcommittee to subcommittee and from year to year as these features of the membership evolve and change." How many Americans know anything at all about the wiring diagram of Congress? Why, indeed, should we expect them to?

**Coherent Policies**. The new order also makes it even more difficult than before for the president and Congress to adopt a reasonably consistent set of policies. In this respect, American policy makers may be denied the capacity to achieve as much coordination and consistency in programs as exists in some other countries. Consider, for example, the prospects for an "industrial policy" intended to foster the growth of particular industries. Whether or not such a policy would be desirable if it could be properly carried out, coordinating the diverse and conflicting aims of all the relatively independent players who would insist in participating in the game is a formidable and perhaps impossible task.

**Accountability**. The new order also makes it more difficult than ever for voters to hold political leaders accountable for public policies. If a majority of voters conclude that existing policies have failed, whom are they to blame? Whom can they hold accountable? The president? Congress? The Democratic party? The Republican party? Their own members of Congress? The executive bureaucracy? Congressional staffs? The fragmented system makes it hard to determine just who *is* responsible. If at the same time the workings of the political system have become inscrutable, should we be surprised if a great many voters feel that they are powerless to determine what goes on in their government? Can we reasonably expect ordinary citizens to be sufficiently familiar with the "wiring diagram" of Congress to appraise sensibly how well the institution is working? Should we be surprised, then, if popular views of Congress are so greatly at odds with the views of scholars who specialize in the study of Congress?

**Nostrums**. Because the way the government works is largely incomprehensible to ordinary citizens, when they look for remedies for what they see as the defects of government their diagnoses and prescriptions are likely to be inappropriate. Consider how American citizens tend to look at the faults of their system. To begin with, they remain overwhelmingly convinced that nothing is fundamentally wrong with it; on the contrary, the American system of government is in the eyes of most citizens the best in the world. If the American government is the best in the world, it follows that its failures must lie with the people who run things. Indeed, a 1991 ABC News poll found that only three out of ten agree that "the current system of government needs drastic changes," and a 1992 Louis Harris poll found that seven out of ten believe that "the system is good but the people in government are not doing their jobs well enough." The popular diagnosis, then, is that the ills of government are caused by defects in the personal qualities of the political officials "in charge" of the government, rather than in the structures within which the officials must attempt to govern.

Given this diagnosis, the obvious prescription in 1992 was to replace the incumbents with better people. In that year of discontent, the hopes and expectations of many voters, it seems, came to rest on what a different president could do to bring about changes in conditions that were widely seen as unsatisfactory.

As to Congress, however, popular diagnoses, prescriptions, and decisions indicated a certain confusion. Most voters had little confidence in "the people running Congress." In March 1992, a CBS News/*New York Times*



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survey found that only 17 percent said they approved of the way Congress was handling its job. At the same time, however, more than a majority approved of the way their own representative was handling his or her job. This rather contradictory diagnosis persuaded many voters to adopt a contradictory cure. On the one hand, in surveys and in state referendums, voters expressed their overwhelming support for term limits. At the same time, however, in districts where incumbents were running for re-election voters chose to re-elect the incumbents without regard to how many terms they had already served.

In this case both the diagnosis and prescription were, it seems to me, badly mistaken. If the main problem is in the political structures, as I have argued here, then term limits will do no more than change officials while leaving the fragmented order still in place without more effective institutions for integrating diverse interests. If in due time citizens discover that their cure for the ills of government is an ineffective nostrum, they may turn to other possible solutions, including fundamental changes in the structures.

The limited possibilities for change in the parties and the Congress means that the main integrative task lies with the president. The election of 1992 may well provide the country with a substantially greater capacity for integrative leadership than it has known for some years because it placed in the White House a president who is not only of the same party as the majorities in the Congress but also extraordinarily energetic, policy oriented, politically skillful, and integrative in outlook, strategy, and tactics. One would be hard put to suggest a better quasi-experimental test for determining how much the new order is simply a product of presidential leadership and divided government in a system of constitutional separation of powers and how much it results from the other factors I have mentioned. Whatever the immediate outcome of the experiment that lies ahead, however, fragmentation is unlikely to be reduced in the longer run unless the occupants of the White House conceive of presidential leadership in periods of divided government as the art of forming and maintaining what in multiparty countries would be seen as coalition governments.

**Change the Constitutional System?** If during the years to come the outcome of the quasi-experiment shows that the main features of the new order are enduring, should we begin a serious consideration of constitutional alternatives?

Among the older and stable democracies, the American constitutional and political system is unique. No other country that has been steadily democratic since 1950 or earlier has our special combination of political institutions. When the American political system seems to be working well, its uniqueness is often seen as a cause for self-congratulation. But when it appears to be working badly, some critics begin to wonder whether its unique characteristics might not be one source of its problems. A few even go so far as to suggest that the existing constitutional system should be scrapped, to be replaced perhaps by a parliamentary system.

But how can we arrive at judgments sufficiently well grounded to justify introducing major structural changes, such as replacing presidential with parliamentary government, plurality elections in single-member districts with some form of proportional representation (PR), or (an almost certain result of PR) the two-party system with a multiparty system—or all of these?

With the knowledge now available we cannot predict that the benefits of a major structural change, such as the adoption of a parliamentary system, would clearly outweigh the short-run costs of bringing about the change itself plus the possible long-run costs resulting from the new structure.

Given the state of theory and evidence, it seems premature to seek truly fundamental changes in the constitutional structure in the near future. The reason is not that our constitutional arrangements are demonstrably superior to those of other countries. They are not. The reason is that judgments about alternatives still rest too heavily on speculation to justify major constitutional revamping.

It would certainly do no harm, and might in



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time be enormously helpful, if more political scientists, constitutional lawyers, and other were to undertake the task—beset with difficulties as it may be—of systematically comparing the performance of our political system with other older democracies.

### Other Changes?

Meanwhile, less far-reaching changes would help. Few aspects of current politics distress Americans more than the dependence of congressional candidates on campaign contributions from individuals and PACs. The only feasible solution appears to be public financing. If a significant portion of public campaign funds were distributed to the national committees and the House and Senate party campaign committees, members of Congress would soon be more dependent on their party organizations. If, on the contrary, the funds were to go directly to the candidates themselves or their own organizations, the political parties would still remain little more than loose bands of political entrepreneurs during electoral campaigns. Because Congress is now composed largely of political entrepreneurs, each of whom would be threatened by increased dependence on their national party organizations, the most likely solution will probably provide public financing for the campaigns of individual candidates. Although reducing dependence on PACs would constitute a notable improvement over the present system, by itself this change would not greatly reduce fragmentation.

The inability of the parties to be strongly integrative during campaigns and elections evidently makes it more necessary for the president and Congress to be so in adopting laws and other policy measures. Despite the disintegration of parties at the electoral level, little-noticed changes in the overly maligned Congress during the 1980s have actually strengthened the effectiveness of the party organizations in the legislative process. As Roger Davidson, a political scientist, has commented, Congress is in certain key respects now "more routinized, cohesive, and even hierarchical than portrayed in scholarly and journalistic accounts." These changes appear to have brought Congress close to the limits of its capacities for integrating conflicts.

One important change yet to be achieved, however, is the abolition of the Senate filibuster. It is absurd to regard the filibuster as a necessary protection for fundamental rights in a system that includes not only a written Constitution with an extensive Bill of Rights but two separate houses—each of which carefully scrutinizes legislation—an independent president with veto power, and the most powerful Supreme Court in the world, armed with the authority to declare legislation unconstitutional. Nor has the Senate rule denying a majority the power to cut off debate—first adopted in 1917 and last modified in 1975—actually served to protect fundamental rights. For half a century it enabled Senate minorities to veto civil rights legislation. More recently, it has allowed a Republican minority to veto policies with which they strenuously disagree. The filibuster is best understood not as a bulwark for fundamental rights but as a convenient means for political obstruction and bargaining.

Because feasible changes are all politically difficult and unlikely to come about swiftly, the main burden of overcoming fragmentation will fall on the president, the White House staff (notably the OMB), and congressional leaders. President Clinton has advanced an ambitious program, surely more than he will be allowed to accomplish in four years. Yet he might manage to overcome the centrifugal thrust of the political system sufficiently to achieve some of his major goals—health care, for example, and the essentials of his budget, even if shorn of the stimulus package.

Like citizens in other democratic countries, Americans are predisposed to judge their government by its effectiveness in achieving results of which they approve. If by 1996 the president and Congress can show enough positive results to demonstrate that our political system really can be made to work effectively, much of the current discontent with American political life will dissipate. But if they cannot, we shall probably witness a rise in the appeal not only of political nostrums but also of more fundamental constitutional changes, the results of which we cannot, on our present knowledge, adequately foresee. □



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**Richard Rothstein**

# IMMIGRATION DILEMMAS

During the presidential campaign, Bill Clinton delivered a foreign policy speech in Los Angeles; the first question from the audience was a predictable, "Who are your foreign policy advisers going to be?" Clinton demurred, calling such considerations premature. Next, a questioner asked the candidate what he proposed to do about illegal immigration. Clinton said he didn't know what to do, since immigration was the most complex issue facing the nation. "If you have an answer," Clinton told the questioner, "*you* can be my foreign policy adviser!" It may have been the first time the "policy-wonk" candidate couldn't come up with a ready solution.

The impossibility of border control is the most obvious difficulty. The Coast Guard can't effectively police every mile of our coastline; the occasional interception of a Chinese human cargo ship is only token. We now have over three thousand federal agents patrolling two thousand miles of the U.S.-Mexican land border, also with little success. Last year, the border patrol intercepted 1.2 million would-be immigrants from Mexico, but since there is no point to incarcerating them (or jail space to do so), nearly all are sent back to try again; 100,000 to 600,000 a year evade capture. So if the intercepted ones keep trying, the odds are increasingly in their favor.

Giving up on border control is no solution either. Open contempt for any important law engenders disrespect for law itself, so we owe it to our national integrity to make serious attempts at enforcement. Also, setting aside for the moment the complicated question of whether newcomers compete with native workers for jobs, it is indisputable that undocumented immigrants who take jobs in labor-short occupations deny places to would-be lawful immigrants who live in nations from which illegal entry is less practical. It is to these equally desperate and ambitious migrants that our ineffective border control is most unfair.

When we attempted to rescue respect for law by abandoning our 55 mph speed limit in rural areas because most people flouted it, we established a new limit of 65 mph, a level we thought drivers would respect. But for illegal immigration, there is no analogous solution, because the most sophisticated analysts can't make a reasonable guess at the level of immigration that must be allowed before control is practical. Even today's educated guess would change tomorrow, based on political developments abroad (like the Tiananmen massacre or the overthrow of Aristide) or changes in economic growth rates and job creation in places like Mexico and the Dominican Republic. The reality would also change with job opportunities here. Fewer immigrants would come if they knew there was no work awaiting them; even in poor countries, people rarely want to leave their families and communities. It's not that the pressure for illegal immigration is so great that if we relaxed our barriers, we'd be inundated with hordes of immigrants. Though nobody knows how many Mexicans would actually immigrate if they could do so unimpeded, the number is smaller than most Americans think. Early in this century, after all, when Mexicans were even poorer relative to Americans than they are today, American railroads and farmers had to send recruiters to Mexico to beg laborers to come.

In Europe, experts feared there would be massive migration of poor Italians to high-



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wage countries like France and Germany when the European Community (EC) was established, so Italian emigration was restricted. When restrictions were finally abandoned in 1968, however, few Italians left home. The wage differential between Germany and Italy was still four to one, but for most Italians, the income difference wasn't great enough to make the upheaval worthwhile. Today, despite continuing income differences between countries like Ireland, Spain, Greece, and Italy, on the one hand, and France and Germany on the other, only 1.5 percent of the EC's population was born in a different EC country from the one in which they now reside. The EC has lots of immigrants—but most come from poorer countries in Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East.

Americans who are frustrated with our country's inability to regulate immigration might reflect on the experience of other industrial nations, even those with less inclusive traditions. Japan, for example, with its aging workforce and declining fertility rate, also has a need for low-wage immigrants, even now in a stagnant economy. Since 1989 Japan has crafted a temporary, and racist, solution by recruiting some 200,000 (according to official government figures) South American workers who have partial Japanese ancestry. But professional smuggling rings are already at work importing South Americans with documents faking Japanese bloodlines. As immigration expert Wayne Cornelius points out, of the 30,000 Peruvians now in Japan, half may be illegal. In addition to those counted in official data, there may be as many as 250,000 Brazilians who came to Japan as "tourists" and then stayed on to work. Japan also has illegal immigrants from Malaysia, Thailand, Iran, Bangladesh, and Pakistan who overstayed tourist visas. And there are 700,000 Koreans living in Japan, many descended from laborers imported by force during Japan's prewar occupation of Korea, others who immigrated illegally in recent years. The sociologist Nathan Glazer remarked a few years ago that "one does not note in Japan, a country with very few immigrants, unmade hotel beds, unwashed dishes in restaurants, unmanned filling stations. It seems there is a way of managing even without immigrants." Glazer should look again. In 1992 alone, 280,000 foreigners came to Japan on short-term visas and then disappeared into the country.

And then there is France, whose new conservative government proclaims a goal of "zero immigration." It's a fantasy. There are already one million undocumented immigrants living in France, with another 4.5 million foreigners there legally—mostly Algerians, Moroccans, and Tunisians. All told, immigrants make up over 10 percent of France's population, and many have relatives and friends who are ready to join them, legally or illegally.

Last year, one thousand would-be immigrants drowned while trying to swim to Spain. Uncounted others made it, ferried to a point two hundred yards from shore by Moroccan smugglers. In return for a promise of $2 billion in aid from the EC, Morocco has now agreed to station 3,500 troops on its beaches to try to deter human smuggling, yet the illegal immigration continues. In Germany there are nearly two million Turkish immigrants, brought into the country over a thirty-year period as "guest workers," who never went home. All told, there are probably five million undocumented immigrants in Western Europe, 1.5 percent of the population. In the United States, there are perhaps three and a half million undocumenteds, a slightly smaller share of our population, though we have another three million formerly undocumented persons who were "legalized" after the 1986 amnesty. Our self-image of America as a nation uniquely open to immigration is historically accurate but less true today. Although our immigration restrictionists are now more civilized than those in Germany, the 8.5 percent of our population that is foreign-born is not much greater than the 8.2 percent of German residents who came from elsewhere. In 1920, however, over 13 percent of Americans were foreign born. *Then* we were unique, not now, when throughout the world, one hundred million people are immigrants in one country or another.



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### Push and Pull

All industrialized nations have an "immigration problem" for similar reasons. When labor markets are tight or we want agricultural or service work performed cheaply, we welcome immigrants, sometimes without restriction, sometimes through official "guest worker" programs. But bringing guest workers into a country is easier than sending them home. Once they arrive, it is virtually impossible to prevent them from leaving the jobs for which they were recruited and finding other work.

It used to be easier to send immigrants back when their work was done, because their wives were content to wait for them at home. But many Mexican women, for example, are no longer willing to stay home while their husbands travel back and forth to earn money in the United States. Now, women want to come north to work as well, either with their husbands or independently. Since 1987 alone, the number of Mexican women attempting to cross the border illegally has doubled, while the number of men has not changed. A consequence is declining return migration for men.

Once an immigrant group establishes a presence, networks linking immigrants with their home country become difficult to break. In the United States, we give priority for legal immigration to "family reunification," meaning that immigrants can bring their relatives here at the head of the line. For example, workers amnestied under the 1986 law will soon be eligible to bring in family members—several million additional legal residents.

Few immigrants leave home without some idea of how to find work in America. Once an immigrant community is established here, this becomes a lot easier. Immigrants recruit friends and relatives from back home when their employers need additional help. In the garment districts of Los Angeles, New York, or Miami, entire plants are staffed by immigrants from the same small village in Mexico, El Salvador, or China. Once such powerful networks are established, policy is impotent to break them.

When George Bush and Carlos Salinas first began promoting a North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), one of their claims was that providing more jobs in Mexico would reduce the Mexicans' desire to emigrate. The claim is heard less frequently now, because it's become clear that the relationship is more complex. Emigration is expensive (the illegal kind often requires hiring a guide and buying false documents for as much as $2,000), and the poorest Mexicans can't afford it. If Mexico becomes more prosperous, more people will have money to pay for emigration.

Traditional societies send few emigrants, but the disruption of traditional ways spurs emigration. As countries industrialize, formerly rural workers, now more rootless, begin to think of the next step—emigration. Industrial workers aspire to better jobs, and when they reach the limit of their upward mobility at home, think of the next step—emigration. Undocumented Mexican immigrants are almost never those without jobs at home; they have above-average education and aspirations whetted by urban industrial employment. In the 1970s, South Korea's economy was the fastest growing in the world, and its emigration rate to the United States was also the fastest growing.

Today, the ratio of U.S. to Mexican wages is about seven to one, and the ratio of living standards (measured purchasing power) is about three to one. As this gap narrows, economic growth and development in Mexico will initially stimulate *increased* emigration to the United States. At some point in the future, most experts believe, the gap will become small enough that emigration will slow. But nobody can hazard a guess about when that point might come—one U.S. government commission recently concluded it could take "several generations." Something short of full equality with U.S. incomes is necessary. Few Americans, after all, move from city to city in search of relatively small wage increases, so long as they have a job at home. Mexicans are even less likely to abandon their culture and homeland for small income differences. As noted earlier, a four-to-one ratio wasn't enough to spur Italian moves to Germany.

Immigration flows are even more immune to



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policy influences because the relationship between economic status at home and the propensity to migrate varies from society to society and from time to time. By 1980, one-third of working-age persons born in Puerto Rico had migrated to the mainland. The migrants were Puerto Ricans with below-average education levels, and they were more likely to be unemployed before leaving the island—just the opposite of today's Mexican immigrants. Why? According to economists Alida Castillo-Freeman and Richard Freeman, it's because Congress raised Puerto Rico's minimum wage so high that island unemployment increased; for the remaining jobs, employers were able to select only the most qualified workers, who then chose not to migrate and accepted relatively good pay at home. Those left on the streets migrated. By establishing a high minimum wage for Puerto Rico, Congress in effect determined that it was better to bring unskilled Puerto Rican migrants to New York than to send New York jobs to Puerto Rico. Had the Puerto Rican minimum wage been lower, fewer islanders would have migrated, but more factories would have left the mainland for the island's low wage haven. Can we conclude from the Puerto Rican experience that Mexican migration will slow if Mexican wages are kept low? No: too many other factors will intervene.

In reality, NAFTA and trade policy could become irrelevant to the volume of future immigration flows from Mexico, since, as Wayne Cornelius suggests, these factors are likely to be swamped by Mexico's domestic agriculture policy. Before President Salinas's policies of economic liberalization, Mexico subsidized peasants to remain in rural areas; the government, for example, bought corn from peasants at twice the world price and prohibited the sale of communal farm lands to private investors. But last year the Mexican Constitution was amended to permit these lands to be sold, and it is widely expected that corn and bean subsidies will decline. The purpose of these policies is to encourage investment in efficient cash crops for export, but if successful, they will result in many fewer peasants working the land: approximately one million peasants are expected to leave farming annually during the next ten to twenty years. The Mexican labor force is already growing at the rate of one million jobseekers per year, from three hundred thousand to half a million more than current economic growth can absorb. Emigration pressures will be irresistible, regardless of NAFTA or U.S. border policies.

### Paying for Our Pensions

Two claims fuel much of the recent debate about immigration. One is that immigrants draw more on public services (like welfare and public health) than they contribute in taxes. The second is that immigrants take jobs from the rest of us.

It is true that local government is burdened by immigrant services. Over 10 percent of California's immigrants are on welfare, and over 25 percent of southern California's jail population are immigrants. But at the same time, our national budget is becoming more dependent on immigrant taxes. Fewer Americans will be working when the baby boom generation (born between 1946 and 1964) begins to reach retirement age in 2010. By that time, we will have spent the boomers' Social Security contributions to offset the federal budget deficit. So we'll need the taxes of younger working immigrants to pay Medicare and Social Security for the older generation. The services–taxes balance of which we now complain will become a national, not a local issue. And immigrants will become part of the solution, not the problem.

Today, 12 percent of Americans are over sixty-five years old, and their health and retirement benefits consume about one-third of all federal spending. When the baby-boom generation retires, 20 percent will be over sixty-five. No longer paying income or Social Security taxes, they will instead consume Social Security and Medicare. These benefits can be paid for only by large tax increases on those still working, by big jumps in productivity or by changes in the ratio of working to retired Americans.

We can improve the ratio if we make people work longer and raise their retirement age.



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Minor steps have already been taken: the normal retirement age for Social Security will be raised to sixty-seven in 2027, and further increases are inevitable. We can also improve the ratio with an increase in birth rates, so that more young workers are available to replace those who retire. This is also happening: the fertility rate (children borne by the average woman) has jumped from 1.87 to 2.05 in the last five years. But this is not something we necessarily want to encourage; it contradicts, for example, our desire to reduce teen pregnancies.

Ultimately, we can't increase the working-to-retired ratio enough without a lot more immigration. While only 26 percent of the U.S. population is now in the prime working age of twenty to thirty-nine, 46 percent of immigrants are in that age group. Retiring baby boomers need people who contribute more in taxes than they consume in services. Immigration will have to be an increasing part of the solution, not only in the United States, but throughout the industrial world. Germans now retire at age sixty, but the sixty-and-over set, now 21 percent of Germany's population, will make up 30 percent by the year 2020. With fewer workers to pay that many pensions, Germany has increased its retirement age to sixty-five, effective in 2012. Germany needs more young Turks, not fewer. Japan's fertility rate is only 1.53 and, in thirteen years, Japan is expected to become the first country in the world where over 20 percent of the population is older than sixty-five, a point the United States can expect to reach by 2025, unless there is a lot more immigration.

## Competition for Jobs

Do immigrants take jobs from residents? In some cases they do and in others they provide labor no native group is willing to supply. It is impossible to design an immigration policy that bars the "takers" and welcomes the "providers."

Important industries (garment manufacturing, for example) could not exist without an immigrant labor supply; no native workers are available or willing to work in these industries even in periods of high unemployment. If natives were willing to work, they would demand wage-and-benefit packages that would certainly make the industries uncompetitive with companies based abroad. Our minimum wage is now so low, however, that lawful employers can survive by paying the minimum to immigrant workers, while sweatshop operators exploit immigrants' vulnerability and collect an additional premium. Because of immigrant seamstresses, an industry exists that supports not only its professional and managerial employees but a variety of upstream workers in computer software, machine tools, textiles, and petrochemicals. In Los Angeles, with mostly undocumented immigrant workers, the garment industry has grown in the last decade, while manufacturing as a whole, and especially garment manufacturing, has declined nationwide.

There is also no displacement of native workers in low-wage service jobs, in restaurant kitchens, say, or hotels. It is, of course, theoretically possible that restaurants and hotels could be forced to pay wages high enough to attract American high-school graduates, but if they did so, we'd have many fewer (because much more expensive) vacations and conventions, not to mention meals away from home.

American upper-middle-class life is dependent on immigrant workers performing tasks at wages no established resident would consider. Zoe Baird didn't need to hire an illegal immigrant to care for her child; she could have afforded to pay good wages. But most two-job families or single parents are not in Baird's income class. Immigrant wages for housecleaning, lawn mowing, child care, and even carwashing make work outside the home feasible for people who could otherwise not afford it. Those who dream of cities without poorly educated, low-wage immigrants should be required to describe what middle-class and even lower-middle-class life would be like without them. It can't be done, but the fantasy persists that a policy could be devised that welcomes the restaurant, hotel, and personal



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service workers on whom we obviously depend, but bans all others.

Another important industry that could not exist but for immigrants is horticulture. In a way, George Bush's inability to banish broccoli from health-conscious American diets is one cause of undocumented immigration. Harvest of corn, wheat, and other grains is mechanized, but fruit, vegetable, and nut horticulture, occupying only 1 percent of U.S. farmland, is labor intensive and consumes 40 percent of total farm wages. A broccoli crop, for example, requires fifty-two labor-hours per acre. According to agricultural economists Phil Martin and Edward Taylor, U.S. acreage devoted to broccoli increased by 50 percent in the 1980s as Americans' annual fresh broccoli consumption almost tripled to 4.5 pounds per person. Broccoli alone brought two thousand migrant farmworkers from rural Mexico to the United States. Other healthy fruits and vegetables had a similar impact; fresh tomato consumption jumped from thirteen to eighteen pounds per person, and U.S. production grew by 38 percent. Production of all vegetables combined rose by 33 percent, because even imports from countries like Mexico and Chile couldn't satiate Americans' hunger for more vitamins and roughage. Besides, Latin Americans also want to stay healthy. Carlos Salinas's goal of "exporting tomatoes, not tomato pickers" is frustrated by Mexicans' consumption of tomatoes at twice the per capita rate of Americans. Even rapid expansion of Mexican tomato acreage won't replace U.S. growers' demands for immigrant labor.

Bush did make something of a contribution to solving the problem. Since fresh vegetable consumption rises with upscale lifestyles, holding down personal income growth kept vegetable acreage from increasing even more than it did. Martin and Taylor report that fresh vegetables have high "elasticities"; in other words, a 1 percent increase in family income is associated with a 1 percent increase in broccoli and lettuce consumption and a 2.4 percent increase for cauliflower. So if the Clinton administration succeeds in reversing the trend of declining family income, Americans will eat even more veggies, requiring more rural immigrants, legal or not.

Factoring these kinds of variables into rational immigration rules is beyond the ability of any policy maker. We can let migrant workers in as the demand for vegetables expands, but how do we reduce the number of "guests" when demand contracts, and how can we require them to avoid enticing their brothers and cousins to join them? Communist governments were mostly successful at preventing workers from being employed without authorization, but no other governments have been able to do so.

There are also industries where immigrants do compete with natives, and this competition not only creates native unemployment but reduces wages for those who remain at work as well. Here's one example: fifteen years ago, residential drywallers—the people who erect plasterboard for interior home walls—were represented by the carpenters union in southern California. They averaged about $1,100 in weekly earnings, in today's dollars. Union drywall agreements required homebuilders to pay for full family health insurance. Each employer contributed to a vacation and pension fund for each hour worked. But in the late 1970s, contractors began to hire Mexican immigrants to work without union contract protection. Immigrant workers in turn recruited their friends and relatives, and by 1982 enough nonunion drywallers (many from just one town in rural Mexico) were available, and the contractors stopped hiring union labor altogether. With the carpenters union out of the picture, contractors also dropped their health insurance plans, stopped paying into vacation and pension funds, and cut wages. Contractors now dealt only with labor brokers who paid workers in cash and ignored income-tax withholding, Social Security, unemployment insurance, and minimum-wage laws. By 1992, drywallers worked nearly sixty hours a week to take home $300 in cash, with no benefits. In an atypical action, these undocumented immigrant construction workers went on strike to bring back the carpenters union. A clever union



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lawyer went after the contractors for minimum-wage violations and used the potential back-pay liability to leverage a strike settlement that included reinstatement of health insurance and a wage increase. Drywallers now earn about double what they got before the strike, and about half what nonimmigrant workers earned a decade earlier.

The construction industry where immigrants displaced native workers and the vegetable industry where no natives choose to work are extreme ends on a scale of displacement. Advocates of loosening border controls cite the former; advocates of tightening cite the latter. Some industries, like garment, can be cited by each. Fifteen years ago, undocumented immigrants fully displaced African-American garment workers in many cities, because the immigrants were willing to tolerate wages and conditions far below what legal workers were used to. In Los Angeles, for example, fifty-five thousand native garment workers were displaced by immigrants in the 1970s. But today, international competition in garment assembly has become so fierce that a domestic industry probably could not survive if it paid the wages of fifteen years ago. Can immigrants, therefore, be said to have displaced African-American workers in the garment industry? Yes and no.

It's probably the case that today, more immigrants are working in jobs natives don't want than in competitive occupations. But even though laid-off aerospace engineers don't normally seek work as gardeners or carwashers, this is a hard argument to make when unemployment is high and wages are declining. And the argument will become even harder if the proposals of some reformers—to increase the immigration of skilled workers—become law. Expanding legal immigration quotas for professional and technical workers will certainly increase competition for scarce jobs.

## Solutions

Total border control is an unrealizable dream; it is impossible to calculate immigration flows to match domestic employment needs; and a variety of uncontrollable and unpredictable economic, political, and social developments in sending countries will, in any event, have a lot to do with the actual level of immigration. As candidate Clinton realized, we can't hope to design a coherent immigration policy. But there are piecemeal policies we can implement that address some of the problems, at least around the edges.

These reforms might, if we are lucky, combine with other political and economic developments to slow the "push" of immigrants from sending countries, provide some additional protection for native workers in those few industries where competition with immigrants is a reality, and encourage more honorable and responsible treatment of immigrants, who, in any event, will continue to arrive. It's not that stepped-up border patrols are entirely useless; it's just that we shouldn't delude ourselves into believing that massive national and international political and economic forces can be reversed by more vigilant policing.

One important reform would be a Mexican development program that goes beyond free trade. If we truly want less Mexican immigration, persuading the Mexican government to slow its agricultural liberalization would be one approach. Failing that, we could underwrite a targeted industrial policy in Mexico, which, in violation of free trade rules, would subsidize the development of small industries in rural areas where peasants are being displaced. Funds spent in this way might be more effective than hiring more border patrol agents.

Similarly, a more aggressive and earlier defense of Haiti's democratic government was, in retrospect, the only sensible (and morally decent) immigration policy we could have adopted with regard to that country's boat people. The civil wars in Central America and Indochina, whatever else they might have been, will ultimately have affected America most by raising immigration flows—as any tour through Salvadoran, Vietnamese, and Cambodian communities in California will attest. But these likely results are rarely considered when foreign policy is fashioned.

Better labor standards enforcement in this country would also address parts of the



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problem. If labor law had been reformed so it wasn't so easy for construction contractors to abandon their contractual relationships with trade unions, it might have been more difficult for immigrants to displace union members in California's homebuilding industry. Enforcement of minimum wage, health and safety, and other workplace rules could reduce, albeit only marginally, incentives for employers to substitute immigrants for natives in other industries where real competition takes place.

Higher labor standards in immigrant industries where native workers don't choose to work would also ameliorate political conflict over the unavoidable presence of undocumented workers. A national health insurance plan, for example, that covered all workers whether here legally or not, would relieve the burden of taxpayers to provide for immigrant health in public emergency rooms and hospitals. Minimum-wage enforcement in immigrant industries, along with a more hospitable climate for union organizing, would put more money into immigrant neighborhoods and increase their tax contributions to the broader community, while reducing immigrant use of welfare, food stamp, and similar benefits.

And also, of course, we could stop eating broccoli. □


dissent

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**Ruth Rosen**

# DOMESTIC DISARMAMENT: A WOMEN'S ISSUE?

I've never considered packing a gun. Not after two young women were recently mugged on a sunny Saturday afternoon two blocks from my home. Not after a drive-by shooting occurred less than a mile from my neighborhood. Not after a crazed former client entered a San Francisco law office across the Bay, pulled out a satchel of assault weapons, and turned a high-rise office building into a killing field.

But if the gun industry has its way, it would sell me and every adult American woman a small, pearl-studded handgun to match her wardrobe. "The well dressed woman of the nineties will be armed," declares one gun advertisement targeted at fashion-conscious middle-class women. Along with a pink-handled semi-automatic "lady's gun," women are urged to purchase such "fashion accessories" as thigh holsters or modified handbags in which to pack a handgun. Also promoted is a midriff holster—beige with lace trim—that conceals a gun between a woman's breasts.

About four years ago, gun manufacturers realized that they had run out of male customers. Women, however, had barely been tapped. Like the tobacco industry in the 1960s, which tried to convince us that truly emancipated women smoked long, thin cigarettes, the gun industry has launched a new and sinister marketing campaign aimed at American women.

The Second Amendment Foundation, a nonprofit organization that fights gun control, recently started publishing a new magazine called *Women and Guns*. Some gun ads promise equal access to the wonderful world of guns. In 1990, *American Firearms Industry*, a trade journal, informed retailers that "One of the quickest ways to boost firearms sales is to inform the public that you are offering women the same fun shooting opportunities as the men."

Most often the ads play upon women's fears of random violence and rape. They know that empty parking lots and darkened streets frighten us. They know that neither our bedrooms nor our offices feel safe. They know we fear rape more than burglary. So they target suburban women, exploit deep-seated racism, and promise protection from "them," code word for inner-city marauders.

The advertising campaign has even penetrated mainstream women's magazines such as *Ladies Home Journal*. One ad shows a mother gently putting a child to bed. The text ominously warns women, "Self protection is more than your right—it's your responsibility." In ads for the tiny Derringer and "pen" guns, the weapon has been transferred from a man's to a woman's hand. A recent Smith & Wesson brochure displays an old handgun reconfigured by "ergonomic research" to fit a woman's hand. It is called the Lady Smith Revolver and is displayed alongside a rosebud and fur coat.

To most progressives and feminists, gun control has always felt like a lost cause: the National Rifle Association (NRA) seemed invincible and anyway, wasn't violence merely the symptom of deeper economic inequities and social injustices?

In the wake of growing gun violence, however, women from different sides of the



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tracks have begun to identify gun violence as a women's issue. In housing projects across the nation, local women have organized their communities against gun violence. At the same time, Adelle Simmons of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and Marjorie Craig Benton, a longtime political activist in Chicago, contacted Betty Friedan with an idea whose time they felt had come: identifying gun control as a major women's issue of the 1990s.

I must confess that when Friedan invited me to a national conference on gun violence as a women's issue, I felt enormous skepticism. Don't we women have enough of a political agenda without adding gun control? Moreover, I don't believe that women are inherently more peaceful than men; we just haven't been given the opportunity to demonstrate how many atrocities we might commit.

Curious, I nevertheless trudged reluctantly to the conference, held in South Central Los Angeles one week after the second verdict in the Rodney King case was announced. After three days of listening to feminists, public health officials, gun-control advocates, police officials, and, most impressively, grass-roots activists from impoverished and devastated housing projects, I returned home a convert.

This is the story of that intellectual conversion.

The first reason that women should confront gun violence is that we are being targeted by an industry that wants us to join the vigilante crowd. Buying a gun, however, is an "individual solution," which only helps the gun industry turn women's fears into profits. The real feminist solution to our fears, Friedan insists, is for women to organize and fight for "domestic disarmament." "Women have secured many rights," the feminist leader observes, "but now they must fight for the fundamental right to be free from fear."

The second reason gun control is a women's issue is that no one else is as well organized—or seems to care enough—to protect our families and communities from random gun violence. After losing several relatives to gun violence, Eleanor Montano founded Mothers and Men Against Gangs, a grass-roots group in Los Angeles that enforces street curfews, intercedes with violent gang members, and imposes a neighborhood curfew. Montano is a tough, articulate woman who commands grudging respect from kids on the street. To her, the struggle against gun violence is a "women's issue" by default; in poor neighborhoods too many men are dead or in prison. "It's up to women," she says. "The mothers of the children who are daily killed by drive-by shootings have to banish guns." She and others rein in gang members by assigning them graffiti removal and other improvement projects. She personally takes kids loaded on drugs to Narcotics Anonymous and has even started a tattoo-removal program. During the past year, drive-by shootings have plunged 49 percent in her area.

In projects all over the country, such women have already organized against gun violence. These women, unsung heroines of local grass-roots organizations, receive relatively little publicity but are responsible for maintaining whatever safety zones exist in their communities. Through long nights, they walk the streets, arms folded across their chests, trying to convince gang members to turn in their weapons and handing over kids who break curfew to the police.

These are not the women buying guns. It is largely middle-class women, assured by the gun industry that they can purchase protection, who must be persuaded of their folly. Few of them know, for example, that buying a gun offers a false sense of security. According to research published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, a handgun in the home is forty-three times more likely to kill a member of the family or an acquaintance than an intruder. Los Angeles Police Chief Willie Williams worries about the thousands of guns purchased just before the second trial of the four officers accused of beating Rodney King. "My biggest fear: Those guns are under pillows and they are on night stands. The people who bought them are not going to complete their training and those guns are headed for tragedy."



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And it is the young who suffer the most when they find those half-hidden guns. The statistics quickly numb the mind. Every day fourteen children in the United States are killed by guns. For teenage boys, gunshot deaths outnumber all natural causes combined. More than 135,000 students now carry handguns to school every day; some schools have had to install metal detectors and build high concrete walls just to protect their students from stray gunfire. On a recent weekend, twenty youths were shot in North Richmond, a poor community slightly north of Berkeley, California. Just another drive-by shooting; didn't even make the evening news. When blacks kill blacks, it doesn't make the front page. When a disgruntled white man kills lawyers in a fancy high-rise building, the media rush in and broadcast the news across the nation.

Gun violence is so pandemic that the Centers for Disease Control have identified it as the nation's number one public health problem. More than two million weapons are churned out by gun manufacturers every year. Add that to the estimated two hundred million firearms already in private hands and it's no wonder that more and more people die in front of a gun barrel. Every twenty-four hours handgun-wielding assailants rape thirty-three women, rob 575 people and assault 1,116 people. Every year, more than 24,000 Americans are killed—whether by homicide, suicide, or accident—with handguns.

More Americans recognize that rather than protecting us from potential tyranny—as our forefathers imagined—guns now threaten the very survival of the nation's citizens and communities. A new consensus is shaping up. According to a recent Louis Harris poll, American public opinion is rapidly swinging in favor of more stringent gun control measures. Nine out of ten Americans support the Brady Bill, a relatively weak proposal that would require a five-day waiting period before a handgun may be purchased. Four out of five U.S. citizens surveyed believe that the easy availability of guns has contributed to an atmosphere of violence that endangers children. For the first time, a majority of Americans (52%) expressed their support for a ban on all handguns. This is a dramatic change from the past. And there is a gender gap among those polled: 61 percent of women but only 41 percent of men favored such a ban (with exceptions granted only by a court).

The time is ripe for challenging the once invincible NRA. According to recent reports, the leadership of the NRA appears to be drifting away from its membership. Committed to absolutist positions, the leadership won't even support the Brady Bill. In contrast, the membership wants to keep its hunting rifles and shotguns, but is horrified by the growing number of military weapons in the hands of urban criminals and gangs. Despite stiff opposition, four states—Connecticut, New Jersey, California, and Hawaii—have been able to ban the sale of assault weapons. In Minnesota, gun owners have become liable for negligently stored firearms. Virginia narrowly passed a bill limiting the purchase of handguns to one per month, a defeat for the NRA. It's seemingly a ludicrous restriction, but it limits the sale of guns to other parts of the country.

There are plenty of good reasons, therefore, why everyone—not only women—should use their organizational skills and lobbying power to push for stricter federal legislation, including bans on all handguns. But it is women, from grassroots neighborhood groups to the PTA to NOW, who are the best organized constituency in American civil society. As Eleanor Roosevelt used to say when a problem seemed intractable, "Let the women do it."

Betty Friedan is convinced that her political Geiger counter is as accurate as it was when she wrote *The Feminine Mystique* or founded NOW. Now is the time, Friedan argues, for women's organizations to resist the campaign to sell women guns and join women in the poorest communities who have been fighting to save their communities. "Thirty years ago, when the women's movement began," she says, "we wanted to start with the most elementary issues for women. But we have enough empowerment now to move on to broader issues."

Those who propose a women's campaign to ban all guns have in their mind models of women's power to challenge established au-



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thority. They remind skeptics—like myself—of the women and mothers in Chile and Argentina who launched effective campaigns against the military by picketing and plastering neighborhoods with posters of their "disappeared" children. Or they point to Mothers Against Drunk Driving, which arguably became *the* primary force behind the successful effort to change the nation's drunk-driving laws. Or they point to the women's peace encampments of the early 1980s, which publicized the lunacy of stockpiling cruise missiles in Europe.

These are persuasive arguments, even to women like myself, who have preferred to argue our causes as citizens, rather than claim moral superiority as women or mothers. Dr. Garen Wintemute, a professor of community and international public health at U.C. Davis Medical School who has tracked the gun industry's campaign to sell guns to women, says, "The possibility that excited me the most is that gun control might become another area in this century where women act as our national conscience."

I confess to a certain aversion to act as men's national conscience, but I see his point. And I am reluctantly seduced by his current fantasy: "Think of the power of women protesting around the Smith and Wesson building." Yes. Imagine thousands of women in the Connecticut River Valley and in Southern California—where most of our guns are manufactured—attracting media attention to the products that threaten the safety and health of those we love. Like the Madres in Argentina, perhaps women would carry pictures of the children who have died from drive-by shootings, or from playing with carelessly hidden loaded guns.

Growing numbers of women activists, public health officials, and gun control organizations are now poised to force "domestic arms control" onto the political agenda. Finding the right language is important to this campaign. Rather than using the umbrella term "gun control," which only plays into the rhetoric of the NRA, women are addressing gun violence as an issue of safety and public health. "Guns destroy families. Let's destroy guns," is one of the popular slogans of this incipient movement. Rather than pushing for regulation, both feminist and grass-roots activists, who cross class lines in this struggle, are asserting freedom from fear as a basic human right.

Many tactics are being bandied about. Some suggest that weapons should be identified as hazardous materials that endanger public health. Others advocate educating the public about the cost of gun violence. (Each gunshot wound costs about $13,000 in health care, 80 percent of which is paid by the public.) Some U.S. senators are sponsoring legislation that would ban the manufacture, sale, and possession of semi-automatic assault weapons. Others want to ban private ownership of all guns, arguing that a civilized society should not allow its citizens to be tyrannized by the constant fear of death.

What might progressives and feminists do? For starters, we can begin to place domestic disarmament on the political agenda. During the 1970s and 1980s we excavated and publicized all kinds of hidden injuries, including marital and date rape, sexual harassment, and wife battering. Gun violence is not such a hidden problem. Domestic disarmament, moreover, crosses class and race lines; it has already mobilized women from diverse backgrounds. Progressive legislators should take the issue of domestic disarmament before the Armed Services Committee as a national security problem. Lawyers might bring liability test cases against gun manufacturers. Media critics can expose the fallacies of NRA ads. They should also try to convince the print and television media to name the gun manufacturer in every story they publish on gun violence. Organizers can gather women and children to picket gun manufacturing sites. The possibilities are endless.

The goal is domestic disarmament. Although progressives and feminists must confront the social and economic inequities that give rise to hopelessness and rage, we must also ban the weapons people use to kill each other.

And to those women seduced by the NRA's ads, we should say, don't pack a gun, ladies; picket a gun manufacturer instead. Guns are killing us, not protecting us. The best way to protect our families and communities is to boycott the gun industry and ravage their profits.□



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**Jeff Faux**

# INDUSTRIAL POLICY

## Will Clinton Find the High-Wage Path?

Bill Clinton's charge that "we are working harder for less" was repeated at campaign bus stops all the way to the White House. Echoing a decade of policy debate among Democrats, he talked of the need for America to seek a "high-wage" path through the new competitive global marketplace. With his election, "Industrial Policy" has crept back on the national agenda: the question now is not whether the government should guide the private sector to become more competitive, but how.

It's still too early to judge Clinton's answers. But, although he is pointed in the right direction, political and ideological timidity seem to be restraining him from taking the steps needed to move the country along a high-wage path. If so, Americans in 1996 will be working even harder for even less. And the Democrats will have missed an opportunity to stimulate their own political recovery.

After years of denial, the political and academic mainstream now acknowledge the long-term decline in average real wages. The effect on opportunities for those who do not graduate from college (75 percent of the work force) has been dramatic. In 1992, real wages for male high school graduates with up to five years' work experience were 27 percent below their 1979 levels.

What to do about declining incomes for the middle class, who, in Clinton's words, "work hard and play by the rules," was a major theme at the post-election Little Rock economic summit. Economist Robert Solow of M.I.T. and John Sculley, founder of Apple Computer, led off the discussion by defining the long-term economic problem as one of sluggish productivity, lack of innovation, and obsolete work organization—particularly in the manufacturing sector. America's choice, said Sculley, echoing the title of an earlier report written by Clinton adviser Ira Magaziner, is between "high skills" and "low wages."

Postulating "high skills" as an alternative for "low wages" tells us something about the politics of the industrial policy discussion. It is an accommodation to the sensibilities of the business participants for whom high wages do not typically top the list of priorities. Stressing high skills rather than high wages avoids the question of how the proceeds of rising productivity are to be distributed.

Nevertheless, raising the issue represents progress. It signals an understanding that in addition to its "macroeconomic" responsibilities for maintaining overall levels of production, the federal government should also concern itself with the composition of output and the way that it is produced. Macroeconomic spending and monetary policies determine the size of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and, thus, how many jobs there will be. Industrial policies affect the quality and wage levels of those jobs. In particular, industrial policy implies that a healthy manufacturing sector is essential for a high-wage strategy. By itself the market—because of its short-term horizons—will not make the necessary investments to keep that sector prosperous.

This idea challenges the notion that has dominated U.S. national economic policy since the end of World War II—and the discipline of economics since the early nineteenth century—



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that a nation must make do with whatever "comparative advantage" (its natural resources, its location, the energy and intelligence of its population) God and history have given it.

But by the late twentieth century, different factors of production—technology, worker and management skills, and workplace organization—have become more important to the ability of an advanced nation to compete. These are factors that can be improved upon by shrewd public choices. The idea is still resisted in most university economics departments, but in the eighties it spread among younger academics, journalists, and think-tanks, and seeped into the consciousness of Democrats in Congress and state houses.

As the presence of Sculley and other high-tech entrepreneurs at the Little Rock summit suggest, this view has now spread to important segments of the business sector. A decade before, the high-tech business people were scornful when some labor leaders and industrialists talked about industrial policy to save mature industries—auto, steel, chemicals, textiles, and so on—whose markets were being eroded by foreign firms subsidized by industrial policies in their home markets. Irving Shapiro, then head of DuPont, Lane Kirkland, president of the AFL-CIO, and investment banker Felix Rohatyn advocated that the U.S. government increase subsidies to these sectors through a variety of policies, including a national development bank. But the high-tech crowd, confident that they were in expanding world markets, dismissed industrial policy as a bailout of economic dinosaurs who simply couldn't cut it in the new global marketplace.

Their political allies—"Atari Democrats" like Gary Hart—joined New Right Republicans and the press in ridiculing these ideas. Soon the Democrats retreated; Walter Mondale, an early advocate of industrial policy, abandoned it and made deficit reduction the centerpiece of his failed 1984 campaign.

But in a few short years many U.S. high-tech firms found themselves outspent and outmaneuvered by Japanese and European companies whose home markets were secured by protectionist policies and who had access to government-subsidized capital.

Following a well-established tradition, these corporate free marketeers went to the Republican administration for help. Instead of sympathy, they got lectures from Reaganite bureaucrats who refused to believe that government-subsidized foreigners were out-competing America's private sector. Gradually, the high-tech community began to look elsewhere for political support. They found it among Democrats on Capitol Hill, Democrats who began to argue that industrial policy was needed to maintain U.S. technological competitiveness. Their efforts created the government-sponsored SEMATECH Consortium of computer chip producers, an increase in funding for technology programs at the Department of Commerce and other civilian agencies, and removed the word "defense" from the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), now known as ARPA. Bush's resistance to these ideas gave the Democrats a wedge to drive between parts of the business community and the Republican party. When Bill Clinton was nominated, many Silicon Valley entrepreneurs defected to him.

After his inauguration, Clinton did several things to lay a foundation for industrial policy. One was to take up the suggestion of adviser Derek Shearer to create a National Economic Council to coordinate the many federal agencies whose functions affect the domestic economy. Another was to choose economist Laura Tyson—a well-known advocate of industrial policy—to be the chair of his Council of Economic Advisors. A third, initiated by an act of Congress, was to organize a "commission" of representatives of government, business, academia, and labor to design competitiveness strategies for the troubled airline industry. Legislation is currently pending in the House of Representatives to create a second commission focusing on the auto industry.

The ideological walls have been breached, but it is not clear how far into the citadel of laissez-faire the Clinton administration is willing to storm. The shared dissatisfaction with



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Reagan and Bush among manufacturing executives and labor leaders conveniently obscured class and political differences among supporters of industrial policy. Business's vision is one in which U.S.-owned firms—wherever they might locate their production—are subsidized and deregulated to make them more competitive with their foreign counterparts. Labor's vision is of an industrial policy that will help create high-paying jobs in the United States. One labor leader who attended a meeting with fifteen business representatives and the president reported: "Clinton asked what we should do. The fifteen business guys said deregulate more and cut the deficit. I said regulate more and invest to create jobs." During the campaign, Clinton could play to both camps. But now that he is president, he will have to make choices, and it will require a much higher level of statecraft to keep the coalition together.

Given widespread ideological resistance to government interference in the marketplace, creating a full-fledged industrial policy will not be easy. For the immediate future, industrial policy is likely to involve a mosaic of government actions rather than a single unified economic plan. To make genuine progress toward building such a mosaic in four years, Clinton will have to fit together five policy pieces. Ranked according to their ideological acceptability in the current political climate, they are

(1) increased government subsidy for civilian research and development;
(2) a national system for training and retraining workers;
(3) a managed trade policy;
(4) finding a substitute for the Pentagon as a driver of industrial growth; and
(5) the reorganization of the workplace by empowering front-line workers.

The good news is that the Clinton administration has taken some steps in all five areas. The bad news is that most of the steps are tiny.

The shift of federal dollars from defense to civilian research and development actually began during the Bush years. In 1988, for example, the military share of R&D spending stood at nearly 68 percent; by 1992, it had fallen to under 59 percent. The limits here are budgetary rather than ideological. There is bipartisan agreement that the federal government should subsidize research that would benefit no particular firm and development that would require private firms to put up some of their own money. Given the political consensus, it is not surprising that the administration has moved most quickly to continue the trend. In Clinton's 1994 budget, the largest share (58 percent) of federal R&D funds still favors the military, but the civilian share will rise faster than the military share.

The chief advocate for expanded training is the new secretary of labor, Robert Reich. Since co-authoring (with Ira Magaziner) *Minding America's Business*, the book that first put the case for industrial policy on the map, Reich became somewhat of an apostate. In a world economy, Reich now maintains, there is little practical distinction between domestic and foreign firms. The only way for us to gain comparative advantages is to create a superior labor force that will attract global capital.

Up to now, the bulk of government-sponsored training programs has been devoted to training the poor and disadvantaged and, to a lesser degree, retraining the unemployed. Reich would have the government take responsibility for a continual training and upgrading of the entire labor force—including the 90 percent who are employed. In his presidential campaign, Clinton proposed a U.S. version of the French system where businesses are subjected to a special training payroll tax (Clinton proposed 1.5 percent of payroll), which is forgiven if they spend an equivalent amount on employee on-the-job training.

But the president has already backed away from this idea. The new taxes associated with his deficit-reduction and health-care plans now make it too tough for him to demand yet another business tax. As a result, there is no significant increase in resources going to upgrade employed workers in the Clinton economic plan, although some more money will be provided for training the disadvantaged.

Expanded training and research and development programs will have some positive long-



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term effects on the performance of U.S. workers and firms. But these are largely activities that improve "supply-side" skills and capital, rather than create jobs. The common complaint about training among workers is: "training for what?" Without the prospect of jobs, the average worker fails to see the logic of going through the expense and trouble to learn new skills. This was dramatized in the middle of the Little Rock economic summit when the President took calls from television viewers. After a long session in which the assembled cabinet officers and experts extolled education and training as answers to the problem of too few good jobs, a woman with a master's degree called from Boston to say that she has been looking for full-time work for two years. Another call was from an unemployed man in Los Angeles who was a tool-and-die maker—about as high-skilled a blue-collar job as one can get—asking how more training would help him. The cabinet officials were silent. The president counseled patience.

Lack of skills does not seem to be the central problem for the unemployed and underemployed. For example, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reports that in 1980 some 12 percent of U.S. college graduates worked in jobs that clearly did not require a college education. In 1990, the number was close to 20 percent.

The greater problem is inadequate markets for manufacturing. And it is a bit eerie to hear Clinton and his advisers, when pushed on this question, repeat George Bush's assumption that the markets will come from increased exports.

The Clinton people are not knee-jerk free-market zealots like those in the previous administration. Bush's trade policy for Japan consisted of fierce denials that the huge U.S. trade deficit with that country was a problem, and political stage whispers to the Japanese urging them to voluntarily reduce their surplus with the United States. It culminated in Bush's tragicomic trip to Tokyo in 1992, when he brought to Japan a group of overpaid and underperforming auto executives to demand that the Japanese buy more U.S. cars.

Clinton's people are much more savvy; they are bargaining for an improved trade balance rather than pledges of allegiance to free trade. It is in this area that Laura Tyson's influence has been greatest. Her presence has steadied the hand of U.S. trade negotiators. The issues are unresolved and made more complicated by a Japanese government weakened by scandal; for the first time in memory, U.S. and Japanese trade officials are negotiating on the basis of interest rather than ideology.

On the other hand, Clinton's embrace of Bush's North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Mexico and Canada moves in the opposite direction. If passed, this agreement will encourage U.S. producers to solve their competitiveness problems by pursuing cheap labor, rather than take the more difficult route of making higher quality goods and services more efficiently. During the election, Clinton stipulated that he would approve NAFTA only after negotiating side agreements on labor and environmental standards. But under the influence of his more conservative advisers, the administration has proposed side agreements that do not even meet Clinton's own criteria. Given NAFTA's unpopularity in the polls and the widespread skepticism in Congress, Clinton will have to spend a large share of his dwindling political capital for NAFTA. This at a time when his health-care program—deemed by everyone to be a key to his reelection—will need all of his political strength to pass.

The trouble with trying to solve the problem of inadequate markets through exports is that every nation in the world is trying to do the same thing. The competition for world markets has become severe, exacerbated by the deflationary macroeconomic policies pursued by international lenders. But even if the G-7 nations could agree on an expansionary global policy, neither NAFTA nor a willingness by Japan to open its markets a little wider nor a successful completion of the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations will provide a market stimulus great enough to support expanded U.S. manufacturing in a way that will generate high-wage jobs.

Robert Heilbroner has suggested that we



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may be in the economic trough of a long-term cycle of technological innovation. The 1930s were such a period, in which the initial exploitation of the automobile industry, which drove much of the investment of the 1920s, had been exhausted. "New investment possibilities arose in the 1930s," writes Heilbroner, citing frozen foods and the electric light bulb. "But they were not enough to establish the basis for a transformational boom."

It took the tremendous technological energies expended in World War II to bring the economy to a new level of investment opportunities. Thus, the jet airplane not only created a booming new aircraft industry, it made possible the explosive growth of tourism worldwide. The computer and the expansion of the welfare state—in health care, housing, and education—are other examples. But these are largely exhausted, and while inventions keep coming, we have not yet seen the development of large new sectors, built on what Heilbroner calls "investment klondikes."

One might argue that this is all the more reason to plow more money into research and development. But just as training cannot be isolated from the question of "what for?", neither can research and development.

If technology policy stops with simply subsidizing research and development, it might do more harm than good to the economy. America is not deficient in basic science or in the ability to invent. A whole series of recent successful "Japanese" products came originally from U.S. minds (including the fax, the flat-panel display, the VCR, and the video camera). But we have not been producing the products for market. And one can argue that unless the government is prepared to assure that the results of its R&D subsidies will be produced in America, we should stop subsidizing it.

Where do we find the engine of growth of demand for high-technology production in the United States? At least in part from the same source that has generated much of the demand for high-tech production for most of this century—the U.S. government.

Critics of industrial policy assert that U.S. business culture precludes the establishment of strong government institutions like the Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI). The idea of Washington bureaucrats telling large corporations where they should invest and threatening regulatory retribution if they do not is simply not credible.

Rather, industrial policy in the United States has been "mission" oriented. It has been successful when applied to specific national goals—creating an internal barge canal network, a transcontinental railroad track, a weapons system, or a space program; supporting the small farmer; establishing an aircraft industry, and so on. For most of the last half-century, the cold war military mission has been the driver of national industrial policy. Now the defense budget is shrinking. But there is little prospect that left to itself the private economy will generate industries that can play the role that defense has played as the major source of support for cutting-edge industrial technologies. As economist Ann Markusen observed in an EPI report entitled *Converting the Cold War Economy*, defense industries

> embody much of the leading edge technological capability of the U.S. These industries have posted the highest rates of manufacturing output growth in the last two decades, and they account for the lion's share of net manufacturing trade receipts. They employ disproportionately large shares of the nation's scientists and engineers. Even sectors such as computing and semiconductors, which have successfully developed extensive commercial markets, still rely heavily on military contracts for basic research and innovation funding.

In recent years NASA and the Departments of Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development, and Health and Human Services have all established their own versions of the military-industrial complex—complete with networks of bureaucrats, businesses, banks, labor unions, and influential members of Congress—which have created small investment "klondikes" of economic growth.

Despite the popular view of these activities as pork barrels, they have been essential for the creation of private investment opportunities.



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And as they have shrunk as a share of GDP, our growth rate and standard of living have declined. Economist David Aschauer has estimated that had the U.S. economy maintained the rate of public investment in infrastructure that it supported in the early 1970s, private-sector investment and productivity would have been raised by 20 percent and 50 percent, respectively.

Investment in infrastructure has a dynamic quality that is missed in the conventional conception of public works. For example, the shrinking of public spending on transportation does not just show up in potholes, worn bridges, and traffic congestion. It has meant that the United States has missed a generation of progress in the development of high-speed rail technologies. High-speed trains are now clearly the superior mode of public transportation for distances below six hundred miles. They relieve congestion. They do not require airport expansion, or construction of new airports, which environmental standards now make all but impossible. Their energy efficiency is three times that of autos and four times that of airplanes.

The United States is woefully behind in this industry. Japan's bullet trains, which go 130 mph, are thirty years old. Newer models have exceeded 200 mph. They are now working on the next generation of systems—including "Maglev" technologies in which trains are powered by superconducting magnets and are capable of speeds up to 300 mph. Europe will soon have a network of trains that can move at 200 mph connecting major cities, and Germany may be even further ahead of Japan in the development of Maglev technology. Meanwhile, the fastest U.S. passenger trains can go only 125 mph, and that exclusively on the New York–Washington Metroliner. Other routes of the small and antiquated Amtrak system top out at only 90 mph.

High-speed rail could be an investment "klondike" of the twenty-first century. Nations all over the world will be buying sophisticated cars, equipment, and computer technologies from firms in first world countries that can produce and install them. But the absence of a market for rail transport in the United States is accompanied by the absence of an industry. Today, only one relatively small American company, with limited capacity, can produce rail cars. Forgoing the public system in America has meant forgoing the private market.

In the last six months of the campaign. Clinton seemed to understand the political potential of the theme of public investment. Earlier, he made a middle-class tax cut the center of his economic program. But this crude attempt to outbid George Bush as a tax cutter was ridiculed by his opponents on both the left (Harkin) and the right (Tsongas) and ultimately left the voters uninspired. This set off an argument within the campaign, with Reich, Magaziner, and Shearer on the side of a public-investment strategy, and a group representing the conservative Democratic Leadership Conference in favor of tax cuts. Clinton decided for Reich and company, and began to pepper his speeches with talk of public goals that might be substituted for the cold war. He spoke of high-speed trains, vertical lift-off, short-haul aircraft, automated highways, and advanced environmental systems for recycling and waste treatment. And he picked up Al Gore's favorite project—the creation of a national information network "to link every home, business, lab, classroom and library by the year 2015."

Clinton's pro-investment advisers understood that there was a power in these ideas that went beyond a list of programs. Creating jobs by building high-speed trains, investing in technologies that clean the air and water, and giving everyone the opportunity to master the computer could be the building blocks of an alternative economic vision that could rival the abstract picture of a laissez-faire future painted by Reagan and Bush, which, in the absence of any competing vision, is implicitly accepted by most Democrats as well. Its concreteness would enable middle-class voters to see, in some tangible way, where a social democratic path might take them. Not Utopia, but as far as one could imagine the U.S. Democratic party venturing in this decade.



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But after the election, this vision began to fade. After the defeat of Clinton's modest stimulus package in the spring, to paraphrase a description of FDR, Doctor "Invest-in-the-Future" became Doctor "Reduce-the-Deficit."

The once-promising high-tech public investment strategy of the campaign was scaled back in the first Clinton budget: $2 billion for high-tech transportation infrastructure R&D, $1 billion for "information superhighways," and $1.5 billion for manufacturing technologies. Worse, once deficit reduction took priority, the administration's commitment to even this level of funding dwindled, allowing the various appropriations subcommittees to downscale virtually all of the president's high-tech proposals.

Clinton has surrounded himself with conservative advisers—Lloyd Bentsen, Bob Rubin, Leon Panetta, and now David Gergen. Reich is at the Department of Labor, some distance from the White House, Magaziner has been handed the health-care portfolio, which could absorb him for another year. Shearer, after getting a toothless job at Commerce, packed it in and went home to California.

The last piece in the industrial policy mosaic is the reorganization of the workplace. Politically, it is the most difficult, but it has the greatest long-term political potential.

U.S. industrial power over the past century was marked by a specific management system—symbolized by the mass-production assembly line. The system of pyramidial hierarchies, known as "scientific management" or Taylorism (after engineer Frederick Taylor), required that those at the top of the pyramid break down tasks of those at the bottom into smaller and smaller pieces. Ideally, the movements of those who actually do the work are programmed minute-by-minute.

The size of the U.S. market made this system ideal for the production of identical mass-produced items. (Henry Ford once said the American public could have the Model T in any color it wanted so long as it was black.) Today, a global market has given the same advantage to corporations located anywhere there is a large supply of trainable labor. Since in most other countries labor is cheaper, the U.S. no longer has an advantage in assembly-line-type-work organization.

For any advanced nation, the high-skill, high-wage path now requires an ability to compete on quality, design, and capacity to speed the product to market. Nations that want to pay high wages have to target their goods and services to market "niches"—segments that will pay for quality goods and thus generate sales with large enough margins to pay high wages. This requires an organizational system that can modify its product or process rapidly to adjust to changed market conditions. This in turn requires putting more responsibility in the hands of the front-line worker.

Inspired by the success of Japanese, Swedish, and German firms, and pushed by business schools, American business has been experimenting with horizontal organization for more than a decade. But old ways die hard. Despite the hype of business magazines, most of their efforts are largely cosmetic. In a new study for the Economic Policy Institute, Eileen Appelbaum and Rose Batt report that most of the efforts at reorganizing the U.S. workplace have been piecemeal and tepid, and therefore have had a small effect on workplace performance. U.S. business is still responding to global competition by shrinking, and cutting wages.

Still, the idea of workplace democracy is spreading. And politically, the idea has enormous potential. It brings a democratic vision to the place where most Americans spend the best years of their lives. It captures the spirit of teamwork and even patriotism in this era in which economic competition has emerged as a major national concern. Clinton seems to understand it. The campaign manifesto *Putting People First* states: "We are determined . . . to create an environment in which workers at the front lines make decisions instead of simply following orders."

The administration has already made some positive moves. Labor Secretary Reich has revived the Department of Labor's program to promote labor-management workplace cooperation (it had been dismantled by Bush) and has appointed a very able former assembly-line



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worker with an MBA from Harvard to run it. Reich and Commerce Secretary Ron Brown organized a Clinton-style summit on this issue in Chicago in late July that showcased examples of how it might be done.

But, as with the other pieces of the industrial policy mosaic, God is in the details. In this case, the most important detail is the administration's attitude toward organized labor.

Many of these efforts have been thinly disguised strategies for preventing, or undermining, unionization. Not surprisingly, many of the initial experiments were in nonunion settings. But gradually, unions have begun to understand that taking more responsibility for the product has a powerful appeal to rank-and-file workers, and now some of the most innovative examples of high-performance workplaces are found in unionized plants in industries such as textiles, autos, steel, communications, shipbuilding, and even public services.

There is increasing evidence that unions provide an essential element of what it takes to create a high-performance workplace—a sense of equality between labor and management. A study by David Levine and Laura Tyson identified four elements that made for an effective high-performance workplace: (1) whether productivity gains are shared with employees; (2) whether workers have employment security; (3) whether there is a sense of group cohesiveness; and (4) whether workers have guaranteed rights. Economists Richard Freeman of Harvard, Paula Voos of the University of Wisconsin, and others have concluded that efforts to create high-performance workplaces are more successful when workers are represented by a union.

Herein lies the problem for American business. Most of these efforts at a cooperative workplace have been half-hearted because they conflict with another, at this point stronger, management objective—to get rid of labor unions. By and large, managers have never come to terms with the idea of sharing power in the workplace. Inspired by twelve years of anti-union sentiment in the White House, they have become even more hostile.

Like most other Democrats, Clinton has been happy to "sup at Labor's table" at election time, depending on labor's money and organization. But when it comes time to rule, labor's seat at the policy table is well below the salt. If Clinton is to succeed in nurturing high-performance workplaces in America, he and other Democrats will have to understand that the shrinkage in the share of the work force that is organized is not good news for them. An America in which management has unchecked power over its work force is likely to be an America ruled by Republicans. The degree of support the administration gives to labor-law reforms that reverse the anti-union bias of the past twenty years may be the clearest indication of how progressive Clinton's industrial policy will be.

No one should bet the farm on a progressive outcome. The administration's shift from an investment strategy to a deficit-reduction strategy can be read as an ominous decision to sacrifice the interests of the industrial sector in order to accommodate Wall Street. It may be that under Clinton we will have more public consciousness about industrial policy with even less cash to pay for it.

The hope for something better lies in the assumption that the president wants another term. Someone is soon going to have to ask Bill Clinton what he intends to say to the majority of voters in November 1996, who, in the absence of a bolder industrial policy, will be working even harder for even less. □

*Dissent* mourns the passing of
E. P. THOMPSON
1924–1993



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**Mark Tushnet**

# IDOLS OF THE RIGHT

## The "Law-and-Economics" Movement

For the past two decades conservative legal theorists have propagated two right-wing approaches to law. Most public attention has focused on the theory of "original intent" as a guide to interpreting the Constitution. In the law schools, though, the theory of "Law-and-Economics" has had far greater impact. The law journals are filled with law-and-economics articles, and no law school believes itself respectable until it has at least one advocate of law-and-economics on its faculty.

Law-and-economics became prominent in the law schools in part because its message fit comfortably with the politics of the 1980s. President Reagan's appointment of Richard Posner and Frank Easterbrook, prominent advocates of law-and-economics, to the federal courts symbolizes that fit. But the reasons for its influence go deeper.

Why did law-and-economics become a significant movement in legal thought? The easy answer—a right-wing movement in legal thought accompanied the rise of right-wing politics—has no more than a grain of truth. Law-and-economics began to take hold in the legal academy during the 1970s, before right-wing politics of an equally conservative sort became as prominent in national politics. And, perhaps more important, the legal academy was dominated by centrists when law-and-economics became prominent, and has remained so. Law-and-economics became important, not because its politics were congenial with those of the legal academy and the general public (they were not, being substantially more conservative than either), but because its intellectual program seemed, at least for a while, to solve persistent problems in centrist legal thought.

Contemporary legal thought has been shaped by two experiences: American legal realism and the New Deal transformation of government. The legal realists, whose jurisprudence found its source in Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes's early work, and which displaced all competitors in the 1930s, began by criticizing the legal formalism that predominated when they began writing. Formalists believed that legal rules could be deduced, using ordinary logic, from a relatively small set of fundamental principles. In the early decades of the twentieth century formalists tended to be laissez-faire conservatives, and the principles they placed at the base of law were highly individualist and conservative.

The early realists were political progressives who disagreed with the formalists' conservative principles. Although they attacked those principles, their more enduring challenge was to formalism itself, of any sort. They argued that legal materials were so complex and contradictory that nothing in particular could be deduced by legal logic. In a famous article, for example, Karl Llewellyn, a relatively moderate legal realist, compiled a list of "canons" of statutory interpretation and matched each item on the list with an equally well-supported contradictory canon.

The legal realists' critique of formalism left them with what they thought was a serious problem. If legal logic did not generate the

This article is the first in an occasional series of critiques of current right-wing thought.—EDS.



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results lawmakers arrived at, what did? One group of legal realists gave an answer: politics. For them, law was nothing other than politics conducted in a special forum.

That answer, however, was troublesome. A great deal of law, even outside the area of constitutional law, was made by judges. Why, in a democratic society, should judges determine the rules dealing with liability for industrial accidents or the rules regulating the duties landlords owed tenants, if law was simply another form of politics? The difficulty was exacerbated by the obvious point that judges and lawyers represented a quite narrow stratum of the social and economic system. If the solutions reached through litigation differed from the solutions reached in legislatures, the "legal" solutions could have little claim on the public.

Beyond differences in outcome, the reduction of law to politics, which legal realism seemed to require, posed a serious problem for liberal ideology. The public rhetoric of liberalism, if not its official theory, made much of the difference between politics, where people simply fought over what they wanted, and law, where people were regulated by principles transcending personal interests. If those principles were merely a fancy way to obscure the interests that the law really promoted, the reason for giving law special authority seemed to disappear.

These difficulties were exacerbated by the massive alteration in government's role accomplished by the New Deal. Legal formalism, for all its defects, forcefully distinguished between the public domain, in which government was authorized to act, and the private one, protected against government intrusion by fundamental rights, including constitutional rights.

But the legal realist critique of formalism established that there was no analytic distinction to be made between the public sphere and the private one. In one decision reflecting realist ideas, for example, the Supreme Court said in effect that the government always made regulatory decisions: Letting the consequences of a "natural" disaster lie where they fell, the Court said, was "none the less a choice" than choosing a rule to "shift" the effects from one group to another.

To use a more contemporary example, realists would argue that choosing to leave the distribution of sexually explicit materials unregulated was as much a choice as regulating that distribution. Nor, according to realists, could anyone seriously contend that society had no choice in the matter because it was constrained by the First Amendment. Their critique of formalism established that interpreting the Constitution was no more determinate than any other exercise in legal logic.

Erasing the analytic distinction between the public and private was troubling enough, for ideological reasons. The growth of government, though, made the elimination of the distinction positively threatening. The New Deal, and its validation by the Supreme Court, showed that there were now no limits on what governments could do, and that governments actually might start doing quite a bit. It was no accident that Justice Felix Frankfurter, the leading proponent of a view of the Constitution that authorized the New Deal, was also a leading proponent of judicial restraint in interpreting the limits the Bill of Rights placed on government authority.

Although some legal realists were willing to live with the demystifying consequences of their jurisprudence, most searched for some way to reestablish the authority of law. Law-and-economics is the heir to one of the products of that search.

The trick was to convert "politics" into "policy." Law, these realists said, promoted the policies society sought to achieve. To distinguish policy from politics, they had to find a way to conduct "policy" inquiries that were more neutral than the sheer clash of preferences that characterized politics. Both steps were accomplished when post–legal realists described law as a "policy science." Law, they argued, should promote the policies to which a democratic society was committed, with those policies described so abstractly that no one could seriously disagree with them: promoting security, enhancing material well-being, ensuring liberty, and the like. But,



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although politics might be one way to promote those policies, politics was too undisciplined. Rather, the argument went, lawyers could use their technical expertise—the "science" part of policy science—to determine, in a neutral way, what legal rules best promoted the abstractly defined goals.

By defining basic policies so abstractly, these post-realists created the possibility of reestablishing the distinction between law and politics. By speaking of policy science, they reestablished the neutrality of law. In many ways treating law as policy science reverted to formalism: abstractly defined policies took the place that fundamental principles occupied in formalism, and scientific and technical expertise took the place of legal logic.

In the end, "law as policy science" was vulnerable to the basic legal realist challenges, but it took some time for that to become apparent. In the meantime, "law as policy science" became transmuted into law-and-economics. Law-and-economics took law's goal to be promoting "efficiency" or economic well-being. That was, its proponents argued, one of the least controversial abstract goals for policy scientists to promote.

## The Principles of Law-and-Economics

Law-and-economics applies the basic assumption of economics—that people try to get the most out of what they have (are "rational maximizers")—to law. If we make that assumption, proponents of law-and-economics ask, what should be the legal rules about accidents, contracts, crime, procedure, and everything else?

The field of law-and-economics really got its start with two articles, one published in 1960 by Ronald Coase, winner of the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Science in 1991, and the other published in 1961 by Guido Calabresi, now dean of Yale Law School. Perhaps surprisingly, Coase and Calabresi showed that, if people could easily make deals with each other, it did not matter what the legal rules were.

Suppose I have a legal right to work under safe conditions, but also have the right to trade that right for higher pay. If some employers find it profitable to use some unhealthy materials, they will offer me more to work for them—say, $5.00 an hour—than employers who find it profitable to use only safe materials, who will offer me only $4.00. If I think that, overall, I will be better off with higher pay, I will exchange my "right" to a safe workplace for the higher pay. I will end up working in unsafe conditions for $5.00; other workers, with different preferences, will work in safe conditions for $4.00.

Now suppose I do not have a right to work under safe conditions. Some employers will offer me safe conditions in exchange for *lower* pay—$4.00. Some workers will think they will be better off with lower pay and safe conditions, while others will work for the higher pay—$5.00—in unsafe conditions. Whether workers have a right to a safe workplace or not, that is, they will end up working for the combination of pay and safety they prefer.

This would make law-and-economics uninteresting, except for the crucial point. Things get sorted out only if people can make deals at no cost to them. If it costs something to make a deal—if there are, as Coase put it, transaction costs (costs associated with engaging in transacting)—then it will matter what the legal rules are. Deals move resources—money and working conditions—to where they are most valued by the people making the deals. If transaction costs are too high, some deals that should be made will not be made, and society is the loser (because resources end up in the wrong hands). And, even if deals occur, the cost of engaging in the deal is basically waste; it adds nothing to social well-being.

The point of law-and-economics then became trying to make sure that people could make the right deals. This had two parts. First, there are some general difficulties in making sure that the right deals are made. If a worker does not know how risky it is to use some exotic chemical, and the employer does, the exchange of unsafe working conditions for a higher wage will not be correct (unless we make some rather strong assumptions about how markets for information work). So, legal



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rules might be used to ensure that both sides have the same information. And, when there are a lot of people on one side of a deal, coordinating their demands is quite difficult; after most people have signed on, the rest can hold out for a better deal, or each one might make a deal that seems best for him or her personally, only to discover that they all could have done better if they had coordinated their demands. Legal rules can help solve these coordination problems, for example, by allowing any one person to get an injunction that would block the deal.

Second, law-and-economics tried to keep transaction costs low by reducing the number of times people have to engage in deals. Suppose that we find out that most of the time workers prefer safe working conditions. If they do not have a right to safe working conditions, employers will offer $5.00 and unsafe conditions, and then lots of deals will have to be made before the workers end up with safe conditions and $4.00. The cost of making those deals is wasted. In contrast, if workers *do* have a right to safe working conditions, employers will offer safe conditions and $4.00 from the beginning, which is what most workers want. Only a few deals will have to be made, with those few workers who prefer higher pay and unsafe conditions. By giving the "right" to the people who will end up with it most of the time, transaction costs are kept down.

All this is pretty neat, and it certainly appealed to the scientific urges that were part of the legal realist legacy. Still, it was not completely satisfactory. Figuring out what the true transaction costs were, and how to keep them down, might seem to be a technical exercise, but it was not a simple one. People familiar with law could not be confident that judges or legislators would get it right—reintroducing the problem of lawmaking discretion that post-realists tried to suppress.

More important, the economic assumption at the base of law-and-economics was that people tried to do the best they could with what they had. One legacy of the New Deal, though, was persistent concern in lawmaking for the distribution of wealth—that is, for worrying about what people had when they went into the marketplace to make deals. (If workers are desperately poor, they may "choose" to work for $4.00 in *unsafe* conditions, so giving them a right to safe working conditions will make them better off.)

Law-and-economics theorists had a series of linked moves to respond to the problems of lawmaking discretion and wealth distribution. First, they relegated questions of wealth distribution to the legislature. Then, they argued that legislatures were so ridden with interest-group pressures that they could not do a good job of determining the right distribution of wealth. Finally, they argued that courts actually did not have much discretion. Legislatures, in short, *should* not do very much, and courts *could* not do very much. These moves responded to legal realist concerns and, not coincidentally, lent support to government policies of leaving the distribution of wealth undisturbed and letting people do what they wanted to with the resources they happened to have: the intellectual agenda of post-realist thought pushed the analysis to the right.

The argument that courts did not have much discretion was simple and, in the end, quite unpersuasive. The basic idea was that people bring lawsuits only if the legal rules they face impose inefficient results on them—make it too costly to make the right deal. Once the courts manage to develop the right rule, no one will bring a lawsuit challenging that rule. So, even if judges get the right rule by sheer accident, that rule will become a permanent part of the law. In contrast, as long as a bad rule is part of the law, cases will arise challenging it. Eventually, even a court acting randomly will accidentally get the right rule. Day by day, in every way, the law gets better and better.

This argument is elegant. No one believes it, though. It turns out to be fairly easy to generate economic models in which the law can be persistently bad. And, perhaps more important, the argument predicts that cases ought to come out roughly fifty-fifty for the plaintiff and the defendant. Although some isolated subcategories of cases do come out that way, far more categories are tilted one way or the other. So, it



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seems, judicial discretion cannot be eliminated. If law-and-economics wants the rule to come out right, judges have to exercise choice.

The legal academy found the claim that issues of distribution of wealth should be left to legislatures largely uncontroversial. The final move, deprecating the ability of legislatures, was harder to make persuasive. It began with the unromantic assumption, widely shared in the legal academy and beyond, that questions about the proper distribution of wealth cannot really be answered through rational discussion. They are, instead, questions about which people have strongly held but essentially nonrational views. That, though, played into another view, that legislatures were places where discussion did not matter but "mere" politics, the play of preferences, did.

Law-and-economics relied on the "public-choice" approach to legislation. According to that approach, we ought to think of legislatures as markets for policies, in which voters demand—and politicians supply. Further, politicians are like entrepreneurs, trying to do the best they can for themselves, which usually means doing what is necessary to ensure reelection.

The key to skepticism about legislation as a response either to failures in economic markets or to problems of wealth distribution is a pair of arguments. First, people who have more wealth in the first place are going to be more influential in the market for public policy, so laws that purport to affect the distribution of wealth are probably not going to be very effective.

Second, concentrated interest groups—business lobbyists and labor unions—are going to win out over the public interest—consumers and taxpayers—because it is much easier to organize (get campaign contributions from) concentrated groups. Legislation, then, is going to be worse than ineffective; it is likely to be positively harmful, taking wealth from the diffuse taxpaying or consuming majority and transferring it to those who already are relatively well-to-do.

Some public-choice theorists have argued that their vision of the political process means that courts should interpret interest-group statutes quite narrowly and, more interestingly, that they should interpret the Constitution to bar legislatures from enacting interest-group statutes. Justice Scalia, for example, has relied on public-choice ideas in explaining (or rationalizing) his opposition to affirmative action programs, which he sees as responses to pressures from concentrated women's interest groups at the expense of men, who fall in no "protected categories" in the law.

Law-and-economics needs arguments to limit the role of legislatures *and* judges to respond to legal realist concerns. Unfortunately for its proponents, the necessary arguments are also unpersuasive. The law-and-economics starting point, the assumption that people are rational maximizers, seems sensible enough, if not carried too far. The public-choice arguments, though, are too cynical about politics: Of course special interests have an important, and perhaps undesirable, part in politics, but somehow legislators do sometimes respond to the demands of the public interest. Public-choice theorists have struggled without much success to explain how "public-interest" statutes like environmental laws manage to get enacted, for example. And the argument that courts cannot do anything is strongly counter-intuitive and, it turns out, inconsistent with a lot of empirical evidence.

Law-and-economics, then, got its start because it addressed real problems in legal thought that were the legacy of legal realism. And it ended up promoting a right-wing political agenda that fit comfortably into the contemporary political scene. It was also supported by material and cultural features of the law school scene.

## The Cultural Setting

Some entrepreneurial law professors, most notably Henry Manne (now dean at the George Mason University Law School), saw law-and-economics as a vehicle for institutional and personal advancement that was compatible with their ideological predispositions. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Manne exposed a



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large number of law professors to the simple versions of law-and-economics then available, and encouraged them to take the lessons back to their classrooms.

The conservative John M. Olin Foundation has supported programs in law-and-economics at several law schools. The foundation's funds bring outside law-and-economics speakers to faculties, creating a source of "patronage" for the heads of the programs at each law school. More important, the foundation has funded law students themselves: in exchange for a law-and-economics grant—in effect, a reduction in tuition—students are required to enroll in a law-and-economics seminar, for which they also get law school credit. This is an extraordinary arrangement.

Entrepreneurs and outside financing are just a small part of the cultural setting in which law-and-economics flourished. Unsurprisingly, the legal academy is oriented toward those who hold power. Ronald Reagan's judicial appointments—Richard Posner and Frank Easterbrook to the Chicago appellate court, Antonin Scalia first to the D.C. appellate court and then to the Supreme Court, and others less in the public eye but well known in law schools—made law-and-economics ideas part of "the law," not just the academy. Often these judges seem to write "for the law schools," addressing the issues raised by their cases in ways that make it more likely that their opinions will make their way, if not into the law, at least into the casebooks from which students learn the law.

More broadly still, the legal academy's search for an external foundation for law has made it parasitic on whatever happened to be highly regarded in the general culture at the time. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, for example, there was a flurry of interest in psychology and psychoanalysis, which has left no trace in current legal scholarship. Four prominent economists who addressed legal issues—George Stigler, James Buchanan, Ronald Coase, and Gary Becker—received the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Science. This validation of their work—and, by inference, the work of their disciples in law schools—has bolstered the position of law-and-economics in the law schools, even though Stigler and Coase in particular have expressed some skepticism about how legal academics have used economics.

## The Future

During the 1980s it seemed as if law-and-economics might become the law of the future. Now it seems likely to play a smaller role.

The growth of law-and-economics reached its limit primarily for the reasons that made it important in the first place. At the start, law-and-economics offered a simple, reductionist analysis of law and a vision of the good society. Its simplicity promised to solve the intellectual problems of explaining how and why lawyers and judges exercised power. But the simplicity could not be sustained.

Outside the legal academy, Judges Posner and Easterbrook were among only a few judges with some sophistication about economics and law. Their colleagues are, by and large, much more ordinary lawyers, educated in an era when the language of economics was rarely used in law schools. As practicing lawyers, they developed "practical" approaches to legal issues. These judges believe that the world with which law deals is much more complicated than the one depicted by law-and-economics. Observing people who come before them in criminal cases and imposing sentences, they know that the cost-benefit calculations that economists use to model the idea that criminal law is a deterrent are only part of the phenomenon of criminal behavior.

Judges, then, may sometimes use economic metaphors, but on the whole they believe that the traditional language of law captures life's complexity more accurately than the simplifications of law-and-economics. Thus, the occasional judicial forays into law-and-economics are vastly outnumbered by more traditional legal analyses. Outside the legal academy, law-and-economics has been contained by what most practicing lawyers see as the world's complexity.

Law-and-economics might break those bonds if it could become sufficiently complex. Indeed, disciplinary pressures push in that direction. After the simple models have been developed, the only way to advance is to



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introduce new variables and greater complexity. What results, however, are increasingly technical articles, which noneconomists find difficult to assimilate into their vision of law. Lawyers could appropriate the simple versions of law-and-economics; they cannot deal well with the more complicated ones that characterize leading work in the field today.

The simple models had another advantage. They generated clear policy recommendations: requiring landlords to maintain their premises was a bad idea because landlords would simply raise the rent and reduce the supply of affordable low-income housing; minimum-wage laws were a bad idea because they reduced employment opportunities for low-skilled, entry-level workers, ordinarily teenagers in inner cities.

More complicated models have more ambiguous policy implications. They may identify situations in which landlords will not be able to raise the rents or employment markets in which minimum-wage laws do not disadvantage entry-level workers. And then the policy recommendations are inextricably intertwined with ambiguous empirical questions: are the markets providing employment opportunities to inner-city teenagers ones where minimum-wage laws really do work?

Simple law-and-economics models were vulnerable in other ways. Everyone conceded from the outset that law-and-economics' normative claims about efficiency had to be separated from questions about distribution of wealth, because, on the technical level, exchanges between people produce efficient outcomes only with respect to the distribution of wealth already in place. If there were a different distribution of wealth, there would be a different set of efficient policies.

Posner attempted to meet this objection by providing a different basis for the normative claims: instead of trying to maximize utility, which he conceded could not provide a sensible guide to policy, we could, Posner argued, try to maximize wealth measured in monetary terms. Virtually no one found this satisfactory, because it made the relation between distribution of wealth and the normative claims both apparent and decidedly unattractive: Why on earth should we find a world in which the wealthy were exceedingly wealthy and the poor grindingly poor more attractive than one in which there was less wealth overall but where the wealthy were merely quite well-to-do and the poor were only moderately poor?

Critics of law-and-economics developed other technical objections. Perhaps the most interesting is the "offer-asking" problem. The simple models depended on claims that voluntary trades between people made both sides better off (otherwise, why would they have traded?). It turns out, though, that whether a trade occurs depends on who is entitled to what in the first place. If I have a nice house, I will rarely sell it for what I would be willing to offer on an equivalent house: I will ask for more than I would offer, simply because I have the house at the start of bargaining.

Economists have tried to minimize the offer-asking problem, saying that it arises only in special situations (primarily, where the asset—like the house—is a significant part of a person's wealth), but casual observation suggests that the difficulty is more pervasive. Probably the most effective example critics have developed involves sexual harassment in the workplace: If the law gives women the right to be free of sexual harassment, they ordinarily will demand much more extra pay to waive that right than they would be willing to give up if they had to purchase the "right" from their employers.

The offer-asking problem is only one among several difficulties that arise in trying to work out the notion that voluntary trades are efficient. But, even if that idea could be worked out, other criticisms are more fundamental. Feminists and others drawing on postmodernist thought have raised questions about the coherence of the idea of "voluntary" action itself. Finding that many women described their choices—to remain in abusive households, to participate in producing pornography—as voluntary when the choices seemed quite constrained, they pointed out that people always made "choices" in social settings that themselves helped define what was a voluntary choice and what a coerced or constrained one.



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A worker might "choose" to get a little more pay for working with hazardous chemicals, but it became hard to see that choice as truly voluntary unless it was really possible for the workers to find another job for less pay in a safer workplace.

Historical experience showed that at one time people accepted some working conditions as "natural," not places about which real choices could be made, and therefore "chose" to work under those conditions without raising questions about pay. Yet at other times people treated the same working conditions as changeable and therefore demanded more pay for riskier work.

## Feminist Legal Theory

For feminists and postmodernists, what was a voluntary choice, a free exchange, was actually a socially constructed, historically contingent fact. Law-and-economics could offer no leverage on the problems it purported to address once that understanding spread through the legal academy.

The feminist movement had another effect. Within the legal academy and outside it, feminism provided an increasingly strong liberal counterweight to the conservative politics of law-and-economics. Law-and-economics had gotten its start by filling a vacuum in liberal legal theory created by legal realism. In the 1970s a group of male legal academics, adopting the name "Critical Legal Studies," revitalized the skeptical strands of legal realism and offered a leftist alternative in which law was seen as a complex reflection of politics and culture. Although critical legal studies has influenced mainstream legal thinking, its political perspective was unacceptable, and its insistence on the legal realist insights obviously failed to satisfy the mainstream's demand for an alternative to legal realism.

Leading elements of the legal academy have been associated with the center-left since the late 1940s, in part because of the long-term dominance of the New Deal coalition in American politics, in part because conservatives believed that working in the private sector was more socially valuable than working in the academy, and in part because conservatives who went into the academy gave up more, financially, than liberals who did the same. The mainstream needed a left/liberal alternative to law-and-economics that addressed legal realism's concerns.

For some in the mainstream, some versions of feminism provided that alternative. The first generation of feminist legal theorists sought to extend the principles of liberal equality to encompass women's concerns. They insisted that principles of justice could fill the gaps that legal realism found in law, and their political program was compatible with center-liberal desires. More recent developments in feminist legal theory, which fit together with postmodernist versions of multiculturalism, are less acceptable to the mainstream. But, because postmodernist feminists manage to retain their connection to liberal feminism on many issues, the mainstream in the legal academy continues to see feminism as an alternative to law-and-economics. In some versions, feminism still promises to be more comfortable to the centrists who control the legal academy than do law-and-economics or critical legal studies.

Law-and-economics became more diffuse, its policy implications more ambiguous and more easily assimilable to the centrist inclinations of the legal academy, and it became more isolated as a sub-discipline with an agenda of decreasing interest to those outside the sub-discipline. Once an intellectual force that threatened to disrupt the centrist commitments of the legal academy, it has become tamed, normalized, and compartmentalized within the academy. Its grip outside the academy was always weaker, and with the accession of a Democratic administration the hold of law-and-economics seems likely to weaken further.

In the next decade law-and-economics seems likely to continue to be one of the languages that lawyers and policy-makers speak. For a moment it seemed possible that it would become the leading dialect, dominating the conversation of law; now it seems likely to be only a specialized discourse, to be used or abandoned as seems helpful. In some ways that is a sad commentary on the life of an intellectual movement. □



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**Todd Gitlin**

# REFLECTIONS ON 1968 AND ENVIRONS

Nineteen hundred and sixty eight came prewrapped in a mythic version of itself. At every moment, one was aware that this was *1968*. The whole year was written in italics.

Everything lent itself to media melodrama, but this was not the fault of the events: they were born melodramatic. At the remove of a quarter-century, the list boggles the imagination: the Tet offensive, the Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy campaigns, Lyndon Johnson's stepping down, the King and Kennedy assassinations, the French utopia of May and its whiff of student–worker revolution, the Columbia rebellion, Prague Spring and the Russian invasion, the Chicago Democratic Convention confrontations; the Mexico City massacre, the Black Power fists at the Olympics, the election of Richard Nixon. Everything seemed stripped down to elements: life and death, raw violence, grandeur and wretchedness. The Vietnam War by itself was such a towering evil that everything attached to it, and to the movement against it, had scale and extremity. The sense of worlds in collision, apocalypses now, the giddy slide (or rush) toward the edge was everywhere in popular culture, from the Rolling Stones' "Street Fighting Man" and "Sympathy for the Devil" or, if you preferred, the Beatles' "You say you want a revolution."

In the end, lost opportunities stand out. Theories like to talk about structures—affluence, revolts against the world of consumption, the cold war, declining American hegemony in the West. But the events of 1968 were so powerful, they also called structures to account. They changed structures. Individuals who might, if they had lived, have held together the symbiotic and mutually antagonistic liberals and radicals were violently removed from the scene. So there will always be a poignancy to these events, a lingering question: what if?

- What if Robert Kennedy had survived, either to win the nomination or to exact concessions from Hubert Humphrey? Might there have been a prospect for a cross-racial, cross-cultural Democratic alliance, a left-populist majority that could have outflanked Nixon's Southern Strategy, outlasted the George Wallace campaign, and given a new lease to the Democratic party's left wing?
- What if King had survived? At age thirty-nine, could he have endured several lean years and still been in place, vigorous and electric, to retake the mantle of militancy once the Black Panthers and the various nationalist groupings had burned out?
- What if Senator Eugene McCarthy hadn't thrown in the towel in early June, walking into Hubert Humphrey's office no sooner than the body of Bobby Kennedy was cold, to say: "Hubert, it's yours"? What if McCarthy had kept campaigning? What if, even after Humphrey had the nomination in hand, McCarthy had pressed him for concessions on the war in

Some of this article is drawn from my introduction to the forthcoming book by Tom Wells, *The War Within: America's Battle over Vietnam*,. to be published by the University of California Press in the winter of 1994. I have also benefited from an article by Norman Birnbaum, "What Can We Learn from the Movements of 1968?" forthcoming in *El Socialismo del Futuro*.



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exchange for an endorsement? What if, then, enough doves had gotten off their hands to vote for Humphrey in the three states (California, Oregon, and Wisconsin) where another 334,000 votes would have deprived Nixon of a majority of the electoral college, thereby throwing the election into the House, where a Democratic majority would have elected Humphrey? If Nixon hadn't been elected, might the Republicans have town themselves asunder, preventing the rise of Reagan and his assembling of a Republican majority?

- What if decrepit Brezhnev had decided to tolerate Dubcek and Prague Spring? Might reform Communism have ripened and spread? Would someone like Gorbachev have been able to come to power much sooner? Would democratic socialist opposition throughout the communist world have survived as a live force to inherit the leadership of a post-communist Eastern Europe or at least to make a fight of it against today's utopian capitalists?

Much commentary on the radical movements of the 1960s is colored by the disappointments of subsequent decades. The right sees the movements as ejaculations of infantilism. The left tends not to know what to make of them. Perhaps, after all, they were nothing but effusions of the privileged? Or the last gasps of the old revolutionary mole?

What remains striking is the sheer sweep of the '68 movements. The national differences are easy to talk about: the giddiness of the Westerners versus the relative modesty of the dissidents of the East; the differing relations between students and workers in, say, the United States and Italy; the differing proportions of individualism, egalitarianism, religiosity, calculation. But virtually everywhere, as Norman Birnbaum points out, there was the same discrediting of elites and the same failure of the historic reform forces, whether those of the Democratic or Social Democratic or Communist parties. There was the pull of generational solidarity. Travelers experienced it face to face and television watchers, image to image. Even if the spirit was easily caricatured (positively and negatively) and converted, thanks to the mass media, to a new consumption strategy, the expansive and generous spirit was there in the first place. So was the longing for personal transcendence that accompanied the sometimes exhilarating, sometimes terrifying—and frequently both—sense of events out of control; the emergence of simultaneous centers of initiative; the breakdown of centers of power; the claim (for a while) that there were no limits to what the will could produce; the intoxication of what the political scientist Aristide Zolberg later called "moments of madness." And there was the robust feeling that cultural and, indeed, geographical boundaries existed to be overcome: that, as the women's liberation movement was beginning to put it, the "personal" (sexual customs, gender hierarchies) was political. Even the boundary between East and West was penetrable. Recall the young playwright Vaclav Havel in New York, enraptured by Frank Zappa and the Columbia students, while, back in Prague, Czech students chose Allen Ginsberg to be their "King of May." Miklós Haraszti, the Hungarian dissident who was then a Maoist, and later and still a prominent liberal, was enamored of Western underground comix and thrilled to see the West German freak left marching out of step at the otherwise deadly Communist youth festival in Sofia.

For all the divergences from country to country, 1968 remains one of those rare moments when hope sprang alive almost everywhere: and yet, at the same time, the sense of desperation was palpable. As in 1789, there was a sense of revolutionary possibility—though unlike in 1789, little violence. As in 1848, there resulted a sense of defeat, and a momentous breakdown in relations between reformers and revolutionaries. There were also unacknowledged tensions—between individualist and communal forms of libertarianism; between those who fought for elemental rights and the overcoming of scarcity and those who thought that history had lifted them heavenward and deposited them in the era of postscarcity. The upsurge of anti-authority, in all its vigor and excess, expressed both a utopian effervescence and a resumption of the complex intertwining of deep American traditions: Emersonian expressiveness and abolitionist egalitarianism.



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Nineteen sixty-eight, along with its prologues and epilogues, was a cusp in a long and partially failed Reformation. There is no Reformation without frequent incoherence and downright self-betrayal—indeed, without Counter-Reformation. In the sixteen and seventeenth centuries, the Vatican regrouped. Repression joined reform. In the end, the Reformation had come to the West to stay. For many decades, Reformation and Counter-Reformation can—perhaps are bound to—coexist, snaked around one another. The Reformation principles this time around are democratic: that citizens must actively engage in the decisions that affect the common life and that no authority stands exempt from the imperative of either proving itself or stepping aside.

The neglected side of the legacy of 1968 is the less apocalyptic, more modest side. From the distance of one-quarter of a century, I think it is proper to see the amalgam of movements—I speak primarily of the civil rights, antiwar, and women's movements—as something other than sectors of a failed revolution. They were popular upheavals, largely nonviolent, *in behalf of democratic ideals*. Their means were self-limiting, to use the subsequent language of the Polish opposition. They extended the boundaries of politics—and yet, for the most part, without surrendering to the temptations of totalism. Their triumph lies partly in their very modesty. Despite various efforts to find a single Holy Grail to unify these movements, they were also, finally, disparate. The antiwar movement in particular was also defensive—a negation, lacking a clear affirmative idea of America's role in the world. Still, without the '68ers, American life today would be encrusted far more than is already the case by bureaucratic inertia, scandal, misery, and decay. Although much "movement" politics today is warped by parochialism, pettiness, and group *ressentiment*, America owes to the movements of the 1960s the glimmering intimation that democratic life is always a possibility—a horizon, as Vaclav Havel has said, toward which we travel although we never arrive.

Consider the movement against the Vietnam War. Understand the movement and the war in relation to one another and you understand not only the disasters of war but the limits, and possibilities, of American democracy. The two together express the tangled nature of America. They constitute one of the phenomenal episodes in the history of democracy—and I mean democracy on the world scale, democracy as an idea that has defined political life, by attraction and by repulsion, for more than two centuries.

The movement against the Vietnam War was one of the triumphs of democratic history. Over many years, resisting illegitimate authority—in the language of one of its clarion calls—the movement defended the Constitution against a war that lacked constitutional warrant. For democracy is not simply the rule of a majority. Majority rule, if unrestricted, may lead to one episode of demagogic authoritarianism after another. No, democracy is also to be measured by the vitality of the common life. It is a quality not of the state alone, but of the populace. Democratic society is both more and different from democratic government—it requires the engagement of a whole population and, if need be, the exercise of popular sovereignty. One of its prerequisites is that it afford minorities the opportunity to become, or to join, majorities. This opportunity comes not only through elections; it comes through all the measures of popular argument, assembly, mobilization, and countermobilization. But opportunity is only a door—the point is to walk through it. The society must also take advantage of the opportunity. Minorities must not only seek to make themselves into majorities, they must find, or create, the means to the achievement of the popular will. Democracy is not for bad nerves or ancestor worship. This is why, in Carl Oglesby's words at the time, democracy is nothing if it is not dangerous.

In the conduct of foreign policy, America's rulers during the Vietnam War were (as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., wrote) imperial. Whatever one concludes from the recent debate about John F. Kennedy's intentions, it is clear that at least in his early years he pursued the war with his customary vigor. "Special operations" like those of the Green Berets expressed his passion for guerrilla maneuver as well as the logic of his commitment to the "long, twilight strug-



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gle" against communism. The deepening commitment to war proved largely uncontroversial within his administration. Dissidents within his administration resigned (Assistant Secretary of State Rogers Hilsman) or were ignored (Under Secretary of State George Ball). "Our greatest mistake was Vietnam," said former Kennedy and Johnson national security adviser McGeorge Bundy at a Berkeley luncheon in 1992, to a question I posed. "I wish we had quit [Vietnam] when I was there. It would have taken bravery."

Whatever Kennedy might have done had he lived, it is clear that after his assassination and for more than a decade beyond, Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon were hell-bent on winning—or at least, as Daniel Ellsberg has argued, refusing to lose—a war with no constitutional warrant. Informed debate was not in their interest. They tried to outflank debate by lying and lying again, and lying about their lies. They used the immense powers of the modern executive to create "facts on the ground." They brandished thousands of American casualties (the Vietnamese, of course, didn't count in their calculus) as arguments for tens of thousands more American casualties. They deceived, discouraged, tried to disrupt and suppress the usually legal opposition. Eventually, they were discredited and defeated by their own recklessness—and by the extraordinary resolve of an enemy fighting on its home ground, an enemy they did not begin to understand. However fervently they tried to bomb and lie what Johnson called "this damn little piss-ant country" into submission, however devoutly Henry Kissinger refused to "believe that a fourth-rate power like North Vietnam doesn't have a breaking point," they were unable to win. And winning, for them, as for Vince Lombardi, was not the main thing, it was the only thing.

Because they staked so much for so long on their arrogance, by the late 1960s they faced a political dilemma that offered no good solution. Lyndon Johnson had plunged deeply into the war, multiplying the American expeditionary force from some 25,000 in 1963, at the time of Kennedy's assassination, to more than 500,000 in 1968. To keep up American morale, he had to produce victories—or the image of victories. To convey that image, he sent more troops, dropped more bombs, killed more people, and made more insupportable claims about how successful this all was. This inflammable combination was bad for political and, eventually, military morale. It aroused still more opposition everywhere in America. Johnson's fundamental blunders helped wreck the Democratic party for the next quarter-century, and converted a potentially great (in the lower-case sense) society into a moral wasteland and a political swamp.

What had started as a rivulet, the protest of a few, grew into the torrent of a vast majority—probably the largest and most effective antiwar movement in the history of the world. As Tom Wells shows in detail in his remarkable forthcoming study, *The War Within: America's Battle over Vietnam*, both Johnson and Nixon were obsessed with the antiwar movement. Most of the movement, in turn, misread the signs from the White House—they took at face value the administrations' insistence that the movement was impotent. After carefully sifting the documentary evidence and conducting his own interviews with many administration officials, Wells concludes that for all its miscalculations and deep divisions, *and without understanding its own strength*, the movement kept both Johnson and Nixon, at crucial junctures, from ratcheting up the war. It functioned as a veto force. To defeat the movement, Nixon shrewdly phased out the draft, "Vietnamized" the ground war (or, as the movement used to say, changed the color of the bodies), and succeeded in moving the carnage off television. But these adroit maneuvers weren't enough. He cranked up the superstate's punitive apparatus. His administration's obsession with an implacable opposition drove him to overreach. In fact, it was the obsessive quality of his fear—that is, his ignorance and his lack of faith in democracy—that brought him down. The resulting authoritarian blunders will forever be known as the Watergate scandal.

Nixon was more insecure, and therefore



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more erratic, than his predecessors. But his idiosyncrasies also have an ancient lineage. Even more than Johnson, Nixon played out one classic motif in the history of failed rule: contempt for the governed. One of the fundamental truths about these men and their inner circles is that they were not democrats. Their temper was "can-do." They were the whiz kids (Democrats) or advertising executives (Republicans) or grandiose would-be architects of world order (Kissinger). All prized secrecy. All failed abysmally at one of the prerequisites of leadership in a democratic society: curiosity. For all their denunciations of the antiwar movement for its "negativism," they could not fathom its depth and breadth.

As Wells writes, President Richard Nixon's speechwriter Raymond Price thought the antiwarriors were lost in "an orgy of right-brain indulgence." His chief of staff, H.R. Haldeman, thought of protesters as "people who want to get excited about something, and they don't really give much of a darn what it is they're excited about."

With the apparatchik's contempt for democracy, Haldeman failed to grasp the essence of a working democracy: that a good many people do indeed "want to get excited about something," and even find many public issues worth getting excited about, because they have the audacity to think the government is theirs. Still, Haldeman's view was a bad caricature of something real. What was developing was the spirit, if not the program, of a general radical movement. The longer the war went on, the more the radical wing of the antiwar movement felt in its bones that there were deep, not just transient, reasons why the national leadership was unable or unwilling to call it quits. The war had to be more than a mistake, it was a crime; or even more than a crime, it had to be symptomatic of a rotten system or even an irredeemably monstrous civilization. The radical wing came to think that the war had been produced not simply by one single branch of the political establishment or even by two branches, but by the poisoned roots of American society as a whole. Because the war pitted a technologically superior, white-led juggernaut against a largely peasant Asian society, growing numbers of opponents came to see it as a racist war, the foreign component of a seamless economic and cultural system characterized by white supremacy, murderous technology, and central power devoid of an instinct for justice. And if established America refused to relinquish the Vietnam War, if it *needed* the war, then it seemed to follow that America needed more than an antiwar movement—it needed a radical revolt, or what growing numbers of activists came to call a revolution, or a demolition job.

The radical conclusion built on the experience and sensibility of the civil rights movement. There first, the young New Left had acquired a taste for direct action and a distaste for the euphemisms of power. There too, for many years, the mechanisms of constitutional democracy were evidently broken, and students had learned to resort to unconventional means, to "go into the streets," to arouse the collective conscience. Eventually, to increasing numbers of activists, unreason did not seem unreasonable. Because of the deadly combination of government repression and our own fecklessness, there was no significant Old Left of elders to lead the movement. The young radicals were available. As the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) organizer Robb Burlage said at the time (drawing on the critic Van Wyck Brooks), we were "spiritually unemployed." So the young radicals played an immense part in the antiwar movement. And the governments kept thickheadedly making the case for a radical shift not only in foreign policy but in the national ethos.

Because the warmakers failed to grasp that the problem was their war, an unjust and (if that were not bad enough for a good American pragmatist) unwinnable war, the war ended up testing the resilience of virtually every American institution—not least the antiwar movement itself. What, for many organizers, started out as an antiwar movement pure and simple rapidly became more than that. It was a seedbed of organized and not-so-organized political and cultural opposition. Largely because the warmakers, America's chief authorities, were smug and entrenched and apparently obdurate, many of the antiwarriors shed their



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respect for authority and eventually their acknowledgement of authority. They would elevate themselves into the only authority they would recognize, an alluring and dangerous political principle. They would go their own cultural and political way. Because such radical self-reliance is psychologically difficult, they would also construct fantasies about revolutionary leaders abroad—Ho, Mao, Guevara, Castro. Never mind that a revolution of one's own is a contradiction in terms, since a revolution cannot be the exclusive property of any group. With their rigid designs, some sectarians conjured their own hypothetical populace, their own moment in history, into an abstract self-aggrandizement. Militancy became recklessness, even self-immolation. For the most part, this played into the hands of the White House. (As Tom Wells tells us, Haldeman's notes from a 1971 meeting with Nixon put it memorably: "Smear the liberals with the left—and keep at it.") Other sectarians, especially those of the Socialist Workers party, woodenly repeated their formulas for decorous politics when more audacious action might have intervened more effectively.

And yet, for all its own sins and stupidity, the movement on the whole was ingenious—a marvel of popular inventiveness. In trying to comprehend the movements of the late 1960s, one must be careful not to be misled by the distorting lens of the media, which tended to prefer the garish and gaudy if unrepresentative images—the bandannas, the occasional burning flags—and today still keep them in circulation as cheap mementos to electrify otherwise mediocre documentary reminiscences. Collective memory is warped by the disproportionate weight of events that were theatrical enough to be recorded by cameras and passed down through the decades as honest-to-goodness "history." Lights! Camera! Cops! Dissolve to Vietcong flags flapping in the breeze to the soundtrack of "Street Fighting Man"!

In fact, for every prominent leader or extravagant celebrity whom the media found colorful, there were tens of thousands of Bill Clintons involved in a local antiwar project, tens of thousands of soldiers, sailors, Marines, nurses, and airmen rebelling against the war. The movement had an amazing breadth and intricacy. The militants, largely vigorous students and ex-students, achieved the publicity, but there were a vast range of activities on the part of religious groupings. There was a state of near-insurrection within the armed forces, even in Vietnam itself. Antiwar wives and children exercised a powerful influence on both Democratic and Republican government officials.

As a would-be revolution, the student movement's militant wing was a catastrophic failure. It cannibalized itself through terrorism and ham-handed Marxism, and helped bury the chances for the most substantial left in American history in half a century. But the antiwar movement as a whole was a considerable if partial success. It set limits to the most awesome prerogative of the chief executive: to deal death and destruction. It saved lives, limbs, and minds. It shortened subsequent wars. Two decades later, through Republican and Democratic administrations, many of those limits are still in force, and whatever one's view of the proper obligations of the United States in Somalia, Bosnia, or Iraq, surely the lessons of the Vietnam War are very much alive. That popular movement still stalks American politics, however wishfully President Bush declared that he had "kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all."

A final note on the uses of memory. Democratic moments are, by definition, momentary. They pass. But their memory should not be permitted to pass as well. Not because they can or should be copied, any more than their conditions can be recreated. Not because nostalgia is a helpful sentiment—it is at least as likely to obstruct an understanding of the present situation. Indeed, at most times in most places, normal democratic life requires much steadier projects, many more supple and complex forms of popular action, than were possible in 1968.

Nineteen hundred and sixty-eight belongs to history. But the history it belongs to is the history we belong to: the history of hope, error, and missed opportunities, and the history of democratic vistas. □



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**Robert V. Daniels**

# THE RIDDLE OF RUSSIAN REFORM

## Is Yeltsin a "Bolshevik in Reverse"?

Communist Russia, though oppressive and secretive, was an open book compared to the murky contradictions and competing ideological illusions that mark the new Russia. The country is far more open than it was, but it makes less sense. Furthermore, Westerners' misguided assumptions about Russia, and the self-deceptions they project upon it, make the country seem more of a riddle than it really is.

Much nonsense has been disseminated in recent months about the background of the Yeltsin government's reforms and the alternatives to them. Reform in Russia after the 1991 putsch, as I see it, was a politically motivated lurch toward extreme positions in politics, in nationality relations, and in economics, based on democratization, decolonization, and desocialization. This phase is now being followed by a little-acknowledged retreat from reform, to one extent or another, in each of these areas.

### Seeds of Destruction

At the outset we need to understand just what it was that Russia has been trying to reform *from*. The conventional wisdom is that a "utopian experiment" in the Soviet Union of some seventy years' standing abruptly "failed." This assumption is shared both by Russians and by outside observers who have been overly steeped in ideological determinism—they explain everything by putting a negative stamp on the Marxist "master plan." In actuality, in the course of its long evolution, the Soviet system took the form of a Russified, militarized, and bureaucratized barracks socialism that had little in common with the pre-1917 socialist tradition. (See Mitchell Cohen, "Theories of Stalinism," *Dissent*, Spring 1992). Under this postrevolutionary and truly totalitarian regime Marxist-Leninist ideology became the officially imposed myth or "false consciousness" to legitimize the power and privileges of the dictator and his acolytes.

But the postrevolutionary system defied all expectations by turning out to be reformable. There was a novel sort of dialectic at work here. Stalin's successors, mindlessly pursuing industrial and military power, brought about an epochal transformation in the nature of Soviet society, above all through urbanization and education. Thus they unwittingly abetted the revolution of rising expectations, in politics no less than in economics. They created a society that could be neither satisfied nor controlled by the old methods. In short, they were sowing the seeds of their own destruction. The decay of the postrevolutionary dictatorship, and not a long-delayed failure of a supposed utopian experiment, was the setting for Russia's present efforts to remake itself.

### Decay and Change

These circumstances of a dying system opened a wide range of choices for Soviet reformers. How far back should they go in Russia's revolutionary experience to find new inspiration? When Mikhail Gorbachev took over, he probably had no great vision of transforming the Soviet Union and thought he could merely reinvigorate it by internal democratization and the power of public scrutiny under glasnost. But he found that to outmaneuver the Commu-



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nist conservatives he had to work his way back through Soviet history, first rejecting Stalin's command economy and then dismantling Lenin's party dictatorship. Still, he clung to what he called the "socialist choice" of October 1917, as well as to the federal union of the Soviet Republics.

These steps toward reform were complicated by a bitter personal feud between Gorbachev and his one-time protegé Boris Yeltsin, who undertook to eradicate everything that Gorbachev had tried to salvage from the communist revolution. I trace Yeltsin's hatred of Gorbachev back to an incident that is overlooked by almost every writer on the subject. In June 1987 the Central Committee of the Communist party met to ratify some promotions, and Yeltsin as party chief of Moscow and a candidate member of the Politburo was in line for full member. But he was passed over, probably because of objections by Second Secretary Yegor Ligachev and the conservative faction, whom he had riled by his aggressive efforts to clean up corruption among the old guard in Moscow. I believe that this episode was the root of Yeltsin's break with Gorbachev the following fall and of his determination to settle scores with the general secretary after the new constitutional reforms permitted him to stage his unprecedented political comeback between 1988 and 1990. From this time on, the desire to destroy Gorbachev and everything he stood for seems to have shaped Yeltsin's choices.

Yeltsin's defiance of the party establishment automatically made him the rallying point for everyone dissatisfied with the pace of political and economic reform. In the spring of 1988 he got himself elected a delegate to the special party conference that Gorbachev called for June of that year to approve the democratization of the national constitution. Then came the extraordinary series of events spelling the end of totalitarian rule by the Communist party—the "September Revolution" of 1988 when Gorbachev downgraded Ligachev and broke the hold of the conservatives on the top party organs; the enactment of constitutional changes to provide a meaningful parliamentary process; the election of the thousand-member Congress of People's Deputies in March 1989 after the first competitive campaigning in the Soviet Union since 1917; and the wide-ranging debate in the Congress when it met in May 1989 that so entranced the nation watching it on television. Yeltsin, running in a Moscow constituency with the backing of a protoparty calling itself "Democratic Russia," overwhelmingly won election to the Congress. Along with many of Gorbachev's reformist friends, he was initially shut out of the new Supreme Soviet (the smaller working parliament elected by the Congress out of their own number) as the conservatives adjusted to the new politics to defend their agenda. However, another deputy's withdrawal enabled him to join the Supreme Soviet after all.

## From Gorbachev to Yeltsin

Entering the year 1990, Gorbachev stepped up the pace of political reform in order to undercut the base of his conservative opponents in the party apparatus and shift the real locus of power to the constitutional structure of government. He gave up the political monopoly of the Communist party, legalized the variety of noncommunist movements that were springing up under the label of "popular fronts," and had himself elected by the People's Congress to a new French-style executive presidency, replacing the old form of parliamentary government with its executive prime minister and figurehead chief of state. He was still mainly concerned to cement his governmental power base against the party conservatives, but in the longer view his failure to risk popular election to the new post proved to be a crucial mistake.

At the same time, in the spring of 1990, Gorbachev extended the representative principles of 1989 to the fifteen union republics, holding elections that were more fully democratic than those to the Union Congress the year before. In some republics the Communists were defeated altogether by national separatists—the inevitable fruit of democratization and a red flag to the Russian conservatives. Indeed, from the start, the nationality problem was the Achilles heel of democratization in the Soviet Union, threatening either to break up the



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country or to drive the Russians back from reform.

In the elections held in the Russian republic in March 1990—without any privileged assignment of seats to the party and the "social organizations" it controlled as in the 1989 Union election—Yeltsin's followers of the Democratic Russia movement won enough seats in the new Russian Congress and Supreme Soviet for him to aspire to the chairmanship. At this point, having tolerated Yeltsin's comeback as a counterweight to the conservatives, Gorbachev threw all his weight to stop Yeltsin—or, more accurately, all the weight he could use without violating his own commitment to democratization and reverting to totalitarian methods. Nevertheless, Yeltsin won the Russian chairmanship—elected by the same Congress that he was later to condemn as a phalanx of communist reactionaries.

In the spring of 1991 (just before the August coup), Yeltsin went on to have the Russian Constitution amended so that he could seek popular election as an executive president, thereby extending to the Russian republic the Franco-American principle of separation of powers that Gorbachev had adopted for the Union. Risking a direct popular election where Gorbachev hesitated to do so, Yeltsin easily prevailed in the June ballot. His success in effect established an independent rival government in Moscow, challenging Gorbachev's authority over the Russian core of the Union and creating what Lenin called "dual power," the mark of a revolutionary situation. This set the scene for Yeltsin's bold response to the attempted coup of August 1991.

These details need to be recalled to underscore the absurdity of Yeltsin's contention, after he fell out with the parliamentary forces in 1992, that the Russian Congress and Supreme Soviet were "holdovers" from the Communist past and relics of the Brezhnev Constitution. To begin with, Yeltsin himself was as much a relic of the old regime as any of his adversaries under the new dispensation. A Communist past is no measure of a given individual's principles today, which is not surprising if we remember that postrevolutionary communism was not a matter of genuine belief but of superficial conformity. When the shell cracked, it hatched a variety of political successors across the spectrum, each camp insisting that it had a lock on political virtue. Yeltson's belief that everyone opposed to him is by definition part of a conspiracy to restore Communist totalitarianism does not bode well for the leader's tolerance of political diversity in a future presidential republic.

Second—an odd thing to have to remind the Yeltsinites—the Constitution and the parliamentary process had no reality prior to Gorbachev. It was Gorbachev's amendments of 1988 and 1989, flawed as they may have been, that created the institutions and the processes distinctive to Russia under Yeltsin. Yeltsin's own political comeback, and the independence of his parliament, were measures of the reality that Gorbachev had injected into representative government in the Soviet Union. It is true that the "conservatives"—former Communists and others wishing to go slow in economic reform and social change and above all lamenting the dissolution of the Union—found a haven in the newly enlivened representative bodies, but this does not mean that the latter had been turned into instruments of neototalitarianism, as Yeltsin and his team have alleged. The irony is that from Gorbachev's time on, the erstwhile enemies of democratization have exerted influence only by exploiting the new pluralism and separation of powers, that is, by exploiting democracy itself.

### A Thrilling Extreme

In his struggle to defy his rival and redeem himself, Yeltsin repudiated the three basic principles that Gorbachev had held to in the pursuit of perestroika—namely, reform of the Communist party, salvage of the "socialist choice" in a reformed economy, and preservation of the union of Soviet republics in a reformed confederation. I will take up these issues in turn.

Politically, as we know, Yeltsin rejected Gorbachev's efforts to reform the Communist party from within. As the party's future was bitterly debated at the last congress, in June–July 1990, Yeltsin demonstratively



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walked out and quit the party altogether. As president of the Russian republic, even before the August coup, he did everything he could to curb Communist activity on Russian territory, and after the coup he quickly and arbitrarily banned the party and seized its property.

In nationality affairs Yeltsin's animus toward Gorbachev was particularly obvious. After the 1990 parliamentary elections, as the smaller republics started defying Gorbachev's Union government by issuing declarations of "sovereignty," Yeltsin backed them with Russia's own declaration of sovereignty. His move took the Russian core of the Union out of Union jurisdiction and left the Kremlin a mere shadow. Though Yeltsin went along with Gorbachev's "Union Treaty" in the spring of 1991, after the putsch he did everything he could to thwart Gorbachev's efforts to keep the Union together. Thereby he sought to eliminate Gorbachev's job. This was a fait accompli by the time Yeltsin met with Presidents Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine and Stanislav Shushkevich of Belarus in December 1991 and carried out the real coup—to liquidate the Soviet Union formally.

In economics, as in politics and the national question, Yeltsin was bent on total destruction of the old system, where Gorbachev was trying to clean it up. While Gorbachev clung to the end to the "socialist choice," despite his rejection of the old "command-administrative system," Yeltsin repudiated any and all policies associated with the socialism practiced by the old regime. He surrounded himself with a cadre of youthful academic economists entranced by the British and American free-market theory that glasnost had permitted them to study. Moshe Lewin has noted ("Russia: Nationalism & Economy," *Dissent*, Spring 1992) how Yeltsin embraced a model of reform based not on the realities of capitalism as practiced in the West, let alone any objective analysis of Russia's real needs, but on an eighteenth-century utopian vision of the market economy. Together with his new deputy prime minister, Yegor Gaidar, Yeltsin plumped for a program of instant marketization, privatization, deregulation, and monetary shock therapy, under circumstances of crisis that usually lead Western governments to resort to more controls and planning, not less. Such was "the catastrophic policy conducted by 'Gaidar's Team,' " in the words of the chairman of the centrist Civic Union (*Megalopolis-Express*, 21 April 1993).

There is something here of the classic Russian tendency to borrow radical foreign ideas and carry them to a thrilling extreme—a sort of Bolshevism in reverse. Indeed, the analogy can be pursued further: the youthful and impassioned Bolsheviks, rallying around their charismatic leader and their uncompromising doctrine, become intoxicated by power and self-righteousness and condemn the older and more cautious Menshevik-Centrists as tools of the reactionaries (a role now played by the "Red-Brown coalition" of diehard Communists and ultranationalists).

Naturally the Yeltsinites echo the Western notion that free enterprise is the basis of democracy—despite the evidence that large enterprise is inherently undemocratic unless constrained from outside, and the frequency in this century of dictatorships presiding over capitalist economies. In fact, among capitalist countries there is a good correlation between the degree of social-democratic economics and the political performance of democracy. Socialism has never led a democracy to dictatorship, though dictatorships have often instituted "socialism" of one sort or another.

A deeper motive, occasionally expressed by Gaidar, was the promotion of a new sort of class struggle. Determined to extirpate what they regarded as the social fundaments of the old regime in the nomenklatura bureaucracy, Gaidar and his team aimed to make reform "irreversible" by replacing the bureaucracy with a new entrepreneurial class, even before they put in place the elementary financial and legal foundations for a market economy. They welcomed economic collapse as a scourge of their enemies, much as the Bolsheviks rationalized the economic collapse of the Civil War years as a purge of the bourgeoisie. They thought of privatization of enterprise as a way to create a new middle class that would support



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the fledgling Russian democracy, while they overlooked the huge existing middle class of professionals, technicians, and white-collar workers. They targeted the nomenklatura of Communist-appointed bureaucrats, but confused the productive nomenklatura of managers—indispensable in any modern society—with the "controller" nomenklatura of the party apparatus. Instead, what reform has mostly generated is a parasitical new robber-baron class of speculators and mafiosi.

In their zeal the radical Russian reformers were encouraged by Western advisers who seemed to be trying to validate, at Russian expense, their own ideological "false consciousness" about the free-market economy. Yeltsin's people were led to overlook all the limitations and problems of the free market that have been the subject of a hundred years of debate and struggle in the West: such matters as the problem of environmental impact of business that the market cannot govern; public services ranging from infrastructure to culture that cannot be sustained on a market basis; the trend to corporate concentration and monopoly if it is not curbed by the state; the vulnerability of the agricultural sector if it is not subsidized and protected; the role of the labor movement and social-democratic legislation in achieving advanced living standards, a welfare state, trade-union rights, regulation of business in the public interest; and the fiscal and monetary balance wheel that has compensated for the worst of the business cycle. Instead, the Russian leadership and their Western advisers undertook to extinguish everything in the revolutionary and socialist heritage, Russian or Western, that had arisen to address the problems created by capitalism. The unfettered market was supposed to take care of the very ills that it caused.

The market, of course, has its place in any economic scheme that is not hopelessly utopian. But reformers under Yeltsin rejected the distinction that the Gorbachevians tried to make between the market and private ownership. They confused permitting private enterprise to be initiated again and the disruptive reorganization of recasting state-created enterprise on capitalist lines. As plenty of West European experience shows, the market is not incompatible either with public ownership of enterprise or with planning.

Indirect planning through state intervention in the market was actually the direction taken by Soviet economic planners in the 1920s, before Stalin destroyed scientific planning during the First Five-Year Plan and replaced it with his irrational and wasteful practices of military-style output commands and material allocations. Stalinist planning was conducted by stupid people (or narrow-minded and terrorized people), in secret, and primarily for military purposes. Thanks to this experience, planning became a bad word, and Gorbachev's government denied itself the use of the planning tool to effect a more sensible deployment of the country's resources. Yeltsin went on to make a virtue out of the abandonment of any rational supervision of the economy, and turned Gorbachev's economic muddle into a self-inflicted disaster. Tragically, the old barracks regime has yielded not to a higher sense of social responsibility but to a pervasive atmosphere of crime, corruption, and greed.

## Yeltsin's Shifts

In my judgment, Yeltsin adopted the extreme positions in reform, namely anticommunism, self-determination, and free-market economics, not as ends in themselves but primarily to advance his personal political objectives. Recent events show, I think, how far he is capable of modifying his stands as circumstances alter the agenda and lead him to back away from those original extreme positions. His changes are most serious in the political realm, less so regarding the federal principle, and up to now ambiguous as regards the economy.

Yeltsin has never been entirely comfortable with the chaos that he helped to bring about when he dissolved the Soviet Union to get at Gorbachev. Probably he did not anticipate how totally the Union would collapse, or the severe economic consequences of its breakup. Nevertheless, he has dealt with the former Union republics with relative restraint, despite the



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explosive problem of the large Russian minorities outside Russia and the political time bomb of Russia's imperial humiliation in the events of 1989–1991. He appears to be having some success in bringing most of the republics of the CIS back into some form of practical cooperation, which he is quite prepared to favor in the absence of any union government headed by his rival.

At the same time, Yeltsin has taken an increasingly firm line toward the nationalities of the autonomous republics within the Russian federation, and toward the Russian provinces as well, where the issue is his own authority. Without any legal authority, he began immediately after the August putsch to appoint provincial governors, and then designated personal representatives to watch over the governors—all reminiscent of central control by the Communist regime over local government chiefs and over the local party secretaries who kept the government people in line. In his recent constitutional proposals Yeltsin made it clear that threats to the unity of the Russian state—*rossiiskoe gosudarstvo*—would not be tolerated.

Like most Russians, Yeltsin does not understand federalism, and confuses it with ethnicity. He counterposes the Russian center to the minority autonomies instead of extending general and equal federal rights to the Russian provinces as well. Apart from one unexplicated reference to the "right of peoples to self-determination," his draft Constitution essentially left the republics and provinces as administrative subdivisions of the central power.

## Taking Both Sides

In the economic realm, in the early months of radical reform, it was easy to forget that for Yeltsin his program was not an end in itself but primarily a way of defining himself and discrediting his enemies. Once this was accomplished, he seemed to lose interest in matters economic, while the political confrontation with the parliament absorbed his attention. By mid-1992 he was ready to back away pragmatically from purist economic reform. He stopped short of total price decontrol on food and energy, and after the fall of Gaidar in December 1992 he reached out to the industrial lobby for his new prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, and other cabinet appointments, all the while asserting his devotion to reform. He talked of a social safety net and he indexed minimum wages and pensions to the rate of inflation, though in practice the main safety-net program was the inflationary credits accorded to industry by the Central Bank to avert unemployment. In the campaign to pass his referendum in April 1993 Yeltsin outdid his rivals in populist promises of economic benefits, despite indications of even worse inflation.

Not surprisingly, privatization proceeded most successfully in the sector of small-scale trade and services, where it had been most irrational to nationalize in the first place. Privatization of larger enterprises through a complicated voucher system took unexpected forms—buyouts by workers' collectives; "nomenklatura privatization" by the old managers; and retention of a major share of state ownership in most new joint-stock companies. *Izvestia*, now a devoutly reformist paper, began to take the Chernomyrdin cabinet to task for attempting to revive the state planning commission, undertake industrial policy, and—heaven forbid—implement "indicative planning."

Yeltsin himself came down firmly on both sides of the economic question, calling in a speech just after the April referendum, for example, for "the formation of a socially oriented market economy," and simultaneously denouncing "irresponsible, inflationary financing of social protection programs." Nonetheless, he may find himself as a practical matter presiding over the formation of a mixed economy based on strong governmental direction and welfare-state promises. Not long ago I commented to a Russian historian that Russia had russified communism more than communism communized Russia. He agreed, but added, "The same thing will happen with capitalism."



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### Standoff

In the afterglow of the failed August coup, Yeltsin was persuasive enough to bring the Russian Congress and Supreme Soviet along in the service of the free-market reform, and they voted him sweeping powers to revamp the economy by presidential decree. It was not long, however, before two events shook the parliamentarians into an adversarial mood that has steadily sharpened. One was Yeltsin's peremptory dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991. The other was his decree of January 1992 abruptly freeing most prices and opening up the surge of inflation that still continues to wash away at the foundations of organized economic life.

Most of Yeltsin's associates from the time of the putsch quickly turned against him, and sought a counterweight to presidential power in the parliament. Taking the lead of the opposition was parliamentary speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov, an obscure economist until Yeltsin installed him as his successor in that post when he moved up to the Russian presidency in June 1991, and the president's staunch ally at the White House during the putsch. In place of his former supporters, Yeltsin surrounded himself with a new bureaucracy, distinct from the cabinet ministries, much the same as the old party secretariat, and he staffed this inner circle with many of his old subordinates from the Sverdlovsk Communist party organization.

The standoff between Yeltsin and the parliament persisted throughout 1992, until Yeltsin finally tossed Gaidar overboard in December in return for an agreement to hold a referendum on his policies, a procedure with which he had become obsessed. Rising tensions nevertheless brought the special session of the Congress in March 1993 to the point of rejecting the December agreement and withdrawing Yeltsin's special decree powers. He replied on March 20 with the preemptive strike that had long been rumored, to institute a "special order of administration" and rule without reference to the parliament until the referendum and new elections could be held. However, he backed off four days later in the published version of his decree, evidently having found that he lacked enough political and military support to make this extraconstitutional gambit stick. Still, he had provoked yet another special session of the Congress, which rejected all compromise and came within seventy-two votes of the two-thirds constitutionally required to impeach the president. Demonstrating again his instinctive understanding of power, Yeltsin staged a mass rally to turn this narrow escape into a psychological victory, and went on to win the referendum, thereby achieving his strongest political position since the heady days just after the August putsch. In the name of democracy he forged ahead to write a new constitution legitimizing presidential dominance, if not dictatorship.

The confrontation between Yeltsin and the parliament has been the subject of vast misunderstanding and misrepresentation, fed by the polemical pronouncements of Yeltsin's supporters. This is particularly true in the United States, not only in the government and the media but among many who should know better. In direct defiance of the facts of 1990 and 1991, the Russian Congress and Supreme Soviet are dismissed as bastions of totalitarianism and creatures of the Brezhnev era, while Yeltsin is hailed as "Russia's only democratically elected leader." Americans rarely stop to recall that their model of the presidential republic with the separation of powers is not the only viable form of democracy, and that most of Western Europe and the British Commonwealth adhere to the parliamentary model that was followed on paper in the old Soviet Constitution. Indeed, in the choice that Yeltsin has been trying to force between the president and the parliament, only a parliamentary victory could preserve democracy. Presidential predominance would ipso facto set the stage for dictatorship, as it has in so many countries that have tried to imitate the U.S. constitution.

Yeltsin's authoritarian instincts were visibly written into his proposed draft of the new Russian constitution. This document was an amalgam of the U.S. and French systems, but with a special twist, to resolve all of Yeltsin's



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recent disagreements with Russia's representative bodies in favor of the president. The French-style prime minister in the previous set-up was retained, but he was to be designated by the president, and the parliament could be dissolved if it did not accept him, while presidential appointments of individual ministers, ambassadors, and military commanders were not subject to parliamentary confirmation at all. There appeared to be no limits to how often the president could dissolve uncooperative parliaments. All legislative initiative respecting taxes and expenditures was reserved to the president and the cabinet, while the two houses of the parliament could only "confirm" the budget. Not surprisingly, the draft spelled out the president's power to call a popular referendum, without specifying the purposes, and it allowed the president to proclaim emergency rule or martial law by merely informing the parliament. He could suspend any act of the parliament or of local government and refer it to the courts. On the other hand, he could be impeached on the motion of the lower house only if this were confirmed by the "higher judicial presence"—which he would appoint.

There is actually a third constitutional model behind these arrangements favoring the executive power. A clue is the name the Constitution drafters gave the lower house of the parliament—the "State Duma," just how the representative body under Czar Nicholas II was styled between 1905 and 1917. Thus Yeltsin endeavored to carry reform back to the earliest and most tentative era of Russia's revolutionary experience under a semi-constitutional monarchy, with a subservient parliament and an executive aspiring to embody the national will.

Russian centrists responded to Yeltsin's plan with dire warnings. Oleg Rumiantsev, leader of the Social-Democratic party and chair of the constitutional committee of the Supreme Soviet, called Yeltsin's plan "undemocratic and unrepublican." Georgi Shakhnazarov, Gorbachev's former press aide, said it was "for a country just having broken out of the clamps of totalitarianism, a straitjacket of a new cut."

Ever since the end of the Soviet Union, fears have been aired about the possibility of a "Russian Pinochet," who would promote reform by authoritarian means on the model of the former Chilean dictator. The actual danger, manifested already in the March crisis and highlighted in the draft constitution, is that Yeltsin might become his own Pinochet.

## Charismatic Enigma

Yeltsin is an enigmatic figure, who has done more than his share to becloud the realities of postcommunist Russia. There is no denying his charismatic impact and his boldness in tight situations. He relishes confrontation and simplifies politics into a death struggle between his democratic loyalists and the totalitarian conspirators. In his campaign for personal vindication he has seized upon the formulas of democracy, market economy, and national self-determination that attract admiration from Westerners. Yet his record makes one wonder how much he really understands these categories and how much his own turbulent psyche and the deeper authoritarian habits of Russian culture actually shape his leadership beneath the labels of classical liberalism.

Yeltsin does not seem to appreciate the function of political parties in a democracy, and prefers to remain above the fray. He has failed to weld his own supporters into an effective party, just as he has failed to accept the principle of a loyal opposition or the pragmatic virtue of coalition politics. The centrist elements as a distinct political force, who reject nostalgia for the communist past but criticize the current reforms and the new authoritarian climate, do not exist for him.

Lacking the temperament to work with any parliamentary body on an equal footing, Yeltsin has pursued the popular referendum to legitimize executive supremacy in the style of Charles DeGaulle or even Napoleon Bonaparte, with a slogan paraphrased from the days of the Communist party: "The president and the people are one." This, unfortunately, is the direction of a democracy in name only, a condition that Russians are familiar with. Let us hope that this is not the only way that the new Russia can be governed. □



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**H. Brand**

# THE WORLD BANK, THE MONETARY FUND, AND POVERTY

*No task should command a higher priority for the world's policymakers than that of reducing global poverty.*

World Development Report 1990: Poverty, *p. 5.*

*[T]he number of absolute poor in the world at the turn of the century will probably be higher than in 1985.*

The World Bank Annual Report, 1992, *p. 46.*

*[T]he president of the Bank stated that sustainable poverty reduction was the "overarching objective" of the Bank.*

ibid., *p. 49.*

The harsh conditions imposed by both the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank upon developing countries belie the concern with poverty expressed in the quotations above. The principle of "conditionality" under which the IMF makes loans available is applied regardless of the hardship it may inflict. Capital flight or "reverse resource flows"—the flow of capital out of, rather than into, developing countries—is disregarded even though well documented. Capital flight has greatly contributed to these countries' foreign indebtedness and aggravated the scarcity of capital from which they have suffered. "Conditionality" means that the IMF's terms must be accepted by the borrowing country. Although the IMF may not be the only lender, other (private or public) lenders will likely be guided by the IMF's action; and important World Bank loan categories have been made subject to IMF conditionality.

During the 1970s many developing countries took on large amounts of debt, made available to them by commercial banks and other private lenders from the enormous funds accumulated by the oil-exporting countries. Such "recycling" was viewed favorably by the U.S. Treasury Department; it helped "privatize" international finance. The terms under which the loans were made stipulated variable interest rates. When the Federal Reserve caused interest rates to soar after 1978 in pursuit of a ruthless policy to crush inflation by making credit scarce, interest rates on the banks' foreign loans likewise rose to levels that made the repayment or "servicing" of these loans by the borrowing countries vastly more costly. By 1981, furthermore, the foreign-exchange earnings (needed to service the loans) of countries such as Mexico and Brazil lessened as a result of recession in the industrial countries, induced not least by the high interest rates. The likelihood of default on debt service threatened an international financial crisis: The banks' loan-to-capital ratio had reached unprecedented heights. (When that ratio reaches a certain level, defaults eat into banks' invested capital; their ability to satisfy their depositors' withdrawal needs is imperiled. Bankruptcy becomes possible, as do runs on the banks by depositors fearing loss.) Intervention by the Federal Reserve averted the crisis. The threat of destabilization of the system remained a longer-term problem. The IMF, with the support of the American financial authorities, now took the lead in compelling the banks to continue lending to the debtor countries in order to ensure continued debt service. At the same time, IMF conditionality was now applied strictly in the interest of maintaining



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debt service: the stability of the world financial system took precedence over the economic welfare of the debtor countries.

In some of its publications, the IMF expresses concern with global poverty. My belief is that the IMF's programs have created or contributed to poverty, as well as to joblessness, depressed earnings, and often severely reduced social spending in debtor countries. Their purpose was to reduce inflation (which invariably benefits the creditor), and to limit the role of the state. The programs also resulted in restricting internal demand and devaluing exchange rates, so as to free resources for debt service (devaluation makes imports dearer, exports cheaper), and thus introduced models of economic development favored by international capital.

In what follows I offer a critique of IMF and World Bank policies. I do not question the need for international bodies that mediate a just global distribution of financial resources. Be it noted, however, that the IMF, like the World Bank, serves priorities defined by the financial authorities of the seven leading industrial nations, especially the U.S. Treasury—the policy goals of these institutions being "delegated [to them] by their most powerful members."[1]

Much of the World Bank's lending, like the IMF's, has been linked to ensuring its clients' debt service, at least since the mid-1980s—although within the broad framework of its function of promoting economic development. In fact, it became involved when it realized that absent economic growth in the debtor countries debt service would be a mirage and private foreign capital flows would dry up (as they largely did anyway). The Bank assures us that its objective "is to help raise standards of living in developing countries by channeling financial resources to them from developed countries." Yet, it doubts that this objective can be reached in the foreseeable future. It notes that whereas a few years earlier it had "identified a path of poverty reduction that would reduce the number of the poor in the world by 300 million between 1985 and 2000 . . . such a target appears no longer feasible"—the number then will be *higher* than in the earlier year.[2] The reasons advanced for this assessment—slower worldwide economic growth, weaker world prices for debtor countries' exports, etc.—do not directly concern us here. We argue that the Bank's policies, like the IMF's, contribute to the profoundly disquieting prospect just outlined.

Traditionally, the World Bank has made project loans—loans for specific, mostly infrastructure investments. Their basic purpose is to stimulate private investment and to broaden the tax base. The Bank makes thorough economic feasibility studies before granting such loans and closely monitors their implementation and effectiveness. It also sees to it that its loans are repaid, repayment being important not only for its own funding but for its standing in world capital markets and the Congress. The Bank is part of the warp and woof of international finance, but it should also be noted that its staff, drawing upon a great store of accumulated knowledge and experience concerning economic development, has gained much influence upon policy and is in sympathy with the needs of its borrowers.

During the 1980s, the Bank adopted a program of what it called structural and sectoral adjustment loans, evidently unrelated to its project loan functions. These adjustment loans became "a major focus of creditor [that is, Bank] policy" after 1985.[3] Under the so-called Baker plan, proposed by then-Secretary of State James Baker in 1985, the "obstacles" to economic growth were to be overcome so as to restore the creditworthiness of debtor countries. The Bank's adjustment loans were to be contingent on a concurrent stabilization (that is, deflationary) program negotiated by a debtor country with the IMF.

The adjustment loans have been designed to improve the "efficiency" of debtor countries' economies. For example, they are meant to facilitate fiscal reform so that budget deficits may be reduced, particularly deficits arising from the losses of public enterprises (such enterprises are common in many developing countries, and were created mainly because of the failure of private enterprise to organize the



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pertinent productive functions). Yet, the Bank's staff has written, "With the pressure to reduce public sector deficits, many governments substantially reduced their investment programs (and current expenditures for maintenance of infrastructure). . . . Such reductions of public investment in infrastructure and human capital seriously jeopardize . . . private investment."[4]

Adjustment loans are also meant to compel financial reforms. Interest-rate controls and credit rationing are to be abolished; interest rates are to be allowed to find their "real" levels (in other words, to exceed the rate of inflation)—the purposes of such decontrol being to increase private saving and private investment, which presumably would ensure sustained growth. Leaving aside the question whether it helps bring about sustained growth, the decontrol of interest rates redistributes income to the more well-to-do, and the elimination of credit rationing channels funds into investments that are not necessarily productive.

Adjustment loans are furthermore designed to promote reforms of a country's trade regime. Tariff reductions are pressed and export is intensified, exposing industry to greater domestic and foreign competition. We will see that such measures depress wages and salaries, and are intended to do so. Furthermore, devaluation, which lowers export prices and represents an aspect of "export-based growth," promoted by the Bank and the IMF, also raises import prices and thereby erodes the model of economic growth that especially Latin American countries have favored since before World War II—growth based on import substitution and facilitated by relatively low-priced imports of intermediate goods needed to build up domestic industry.

It is possible that the import-substitution model of economic growth has been exhausted, or nearly so, and that some features of the adjustment demanded by the World Bank and the IMF have become acceptable to debtor countries. Continued integration of these countries in the world capitalist economy is in any case predicated upon such acceptance. Such integration also requires far more private capital than is willing to invest in developing countries. A major objective of the IMF's and World Bank's focus upon debt service has been to enlarge the flow of private capital that the observance of pertinent terms would engender. As of 1990, an enormous percentage of net lending to the developing countries—77 percent—stemmed from "official creditors"—mostly the World Bank—compared with 34 percent ten years, and 57 percent five years earlier. Thus, private lenders have virtually withdrawn from such lending. Withdrawal from such lending was clearly signaled when Citicorp wrote off its large developing-country loan loss in 1987; its action was followed by other large banks. As of 1990, these banks "had got rid of half of all developing country debt on their books in 1984."[5] The pressure on "official lenders" (which include the governments of the OECD [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development] countries) to supply badly needed capital comes in a time of great budgetary stringencies and intensifying competition for such capital from Eastern Europe and Russia. Hence, both the World Bank and the IMF have insisted that "renewed access to the international capital market" would be obtained "first and foremost [by] strong implementation of an adjustment program that lays the foundation for stable growth."[6] But that remains a most dubious prospect, and the statement also obscures the systemic inability of international finance to provide adequate capital to the poorer countries, and to refrain from imposing conditions that rend these countries' social fabric.

The influence of the IMF upon the economic policies of developing countries increased substantially during the 1980s. During the eighties the IMF approved half again as many stabilization programs as it had during the seventies; the total dollar amounts involved ran four times as high. IMF loans were extended mainly to finance balance-of-payments deficits that in the earlier decade had been covered chiefly by the commercial banks. The banks, however, could not impose conditions that would affect the economic policies of the



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borrowing countries. The IMF's and World Bank's insistence upon structural change in the direction of privatizing public enterprise, financial deregulation in the interest of private investors, and competition unencumbered by tariffs or other barriers was a new development, one characteristic of the 1980s. In 1991 Under Secretary of the Treasury for International Affairs David Mulford laid out the basic orientation of the two international financial institutions. Claiming that during the 1950s and 1960s state ownership or management of developing economies "did not work," while strategies giving the market "a major role in the development process" did—claims for which he adduced no facts—the under secretary stated that "this evidence gave rise to an emerging focus on structural policy reform . . . to foster efficient, market-oriented economic choices and resource allocation. . . . The U.S. has also been instrumental in fostering the growing global consensus on the need for the local private sector to be the primary engine for development."[7] There arises the obvious question why a publicly funded financial agency should promote private interests. There is the further question of how a private-sector "engine for development" would address, let alone cope with, the great and urgent problems of poverty and unemployment besetting most developing economies. True, their governments have not done this very competently, but weakening them is bound to worsen matters.

The debt crisis into which the developing countries were plunged in the early eighties was itself largely the outcome of the actions of private agents (that is, the commercial banks) and of the deliberate passivity of the U.S. government. Banks were owed more than $250 billion by the developing countries in the early 1980s; in 1970, the figure has been $3.4 billion. The vulnerability of the banks in terms of their capital-loan ratios was unprecedented; the nine U.S. banks that were major lenders to Mexico, for example, had tied up the equivalent of 45 percent of their capital in loans to that country (the "normal" ratio has been less than 5 percent). As mentioned, the banks' funds for developing country loans on so large a scale were derived from the "recycling" of surplus funds from the oil-exporting countries, vastly enlarged by earnings from steep price increases. The Treasury Department, then Under Secretary William Simon, encouraged such recycling action, praising the banks as "efficient intermediaries." When Denis Healy, a former British chancellor of the exchequer, proposed an official international scheme for recycling the surpluses, he found the Americans to be "hostile" to such a scheme. The Treasury's deliberate passivity in this matter, and its hostile reaction to proposals advocating a responsible official policy, had its source in an ideology of deregulation and privatization, which powerfully contributed to the disastrous indebtedness of developing countries, and to the (foreseeable) difficulty of overcoming it. That same ideology, promoted by clever academicians, consultants, and other advisers, is now infusing IMF and World Bank policies. It is unlikely that its consequences will be more benign than those that followed upon the "privatization" of recycling the oil-exporting countries' surpluses.

And that, all the more so when one examines the actions of the wealthy in many of the debtor countries. Over the 1978–88 period, capital *originating* in these countries and invested abroad—most if not all of it in the industrial countries—represented the equivalent of between two-fifths and one-half of the indebtedness of the "highly indebted developing countries" (as defined by the IMF). Such capital flight of course aggravated the problems of internal productive investment. Capital flight from Mexico, for example, averaged $5.3 billion per year between 1980 and 1987, equal to 15 percent of that country's outlays for such investment. After 1982, writes an IMF author, "capital flight resulted in net transfers of resources [from] (indebted developing) countries."[8] True, some repatriation of flight capital has occurred since 1988, but it is low relative to assets held abroad, for example, by Mexican nationals, estimated by the IMF at $50 billion.

The World Bank sees the question of capital flight entirely from the asset owners' point of view and has sharply rejected attempts by governments facing critical capital shortages to control it. Neither it nor the IMF has made the



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control of capital flight a condition of its adjustment aid. "Sound macroeconomic policies and appropriate structural reforms are . . . likely to be important elements in solving the problem," it has written.[9] Those reforms are thus defined in the interest of private asset owners, rather than of the people whom the governments presumably serve.

Toward the end of the 1980s, a degree of debt relief was initiated under the Brady plan, named after Nicholas Brady, then the secretary of the treasury. Debt relief followed the recognition, mentioned above, that debt repayment would be impossible without economic growth and "structural reform" that would increase export earnings. However, the principle that the international financial system must not be impaired by insolvencies or by concessions which debt relief entailed was not to be disturbed. The commercial banks were essentially bailed out: much of the debt and interest owed them was repaid by way of new loans extended to the indebted countries by official creditors as well as by way of tax credits granted by the Treasury for their developing-country loan loss writeoffs. The cost of the bailout was thus shifted to the tax-paying public in the United States.

The official creditors eased the terms of their loans to the debtor countries and rescheduled (stretched out) debt service. All such rescheduling was conditioned upon an agreement with the IMF being in place. Considering the burden of compliance with IMF policy, on top of the debt burden, why did not affected countries—most of Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa—combine to default? Apart from divergent interests, they feared lack of future access to the international capital markets. More important, they had been warned by the U.S. Government that "non-payment of interest on the foreign debt constitutes a major breach in international financial relations, a major breach in normal relations with the United States."[10] Thus, unmistakably, the government of the United States backed up the IMF as the "[institutional] vehicle through which the international financial community manifests to the borrowing member countries its priorities." Its programs, according to one of the most competent observers, reflected these priorities, "rather than the realities of economic adjustment."[11] The same observer stated that "the burden of debt servicing serves as an effective tax on adjustment; any gains made are siphoned off to the benefit of outside creditors."[12]

More important perhaps, the financial resources anticipated under the IMF's and World Bank's adjustment programs, or under the Baker and Brady plans, have not been forthcoming in significant degree. Together with the restrictive effects of those programs, the resulting scarcity of capital has further degraded developing-country economies. The low- and middle-income economies' growth rate of per-capita gross domestic product, a crude but widely accepted indicator of a population's welfare, shrank 1.4 percent annually between 1981 and 1987, compared with an average annual advance of 2.6 percent over the 1973–80 period. It rose slightly in 1988, but again declined thereafter, turning negative in the early 1990s. In what the World Bank terms "severely indebted" middle-income countries, barely any rise occurred in per-capita GDP between 1981 and 1987; it fell steeply thereafter. Hence, real per-capita consumption expenditures, which had substantially grown during the 1970s, stagnated or contracted subsequently in a number of middle- and low-income countries. The setback that these data suggest has found eloquent expression in a report by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); it is worth quoting a pertinent paragraph:

> The term "lost decade" was used in past assessments to illustrate the extent of the economic setback suffered by the vast majority of the countries of the region. Even if economic performance were measured by only the most aggregated indicator, this term is nevertheless an understatement, for the fact is that at the end of 1989 the region's average per-capita gross domestic product was 8% lower than it had been in 1980 and was the same as that of 1977. . . . If to this is added the fact that such decline had a markedly regressive bias, then it can responsibly be asserted that, in terms of the level of material well-being of



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> the Latin American and Caribbean population, the 1980s witnessed a decline of capital proportions.[13]

Declining flows of long-term capital represented a key factor here. After subtracting debt service, these flows amounted at the end of the 1980s to only about one-half of what they had been at their beginning. For Latin America alone, heavy *reverse* capital flows, representing debt service as well as capital flight, have been reported for every year since 1984.

A further consequence of these unfavorable capital flows has been an absolute decline in the domestic investment in plant, equipment, and infrastructure. The decline averaged −1.4 percent per year for the middle-income developing countries, and −4.1 percent for the low-income countries over the 1982–90 span. Again, ECLAC has written:

> A phenomenon linked with the gradual slowdown in the Latin American and Caribbean economies in the 1980s was the marked decline in net investment. . . . As a result of the decline in the terms of trade and the rising external debt service, which was accompanied almost always by a decline in the inflow of external capital, net potential investment resources shrank considerably. Thus, the region's net investment coefficient dropped from nearly 23 percent in 1980 to 16.5 percent in 1988.[14]

The World Bank confirms this tendency with regard to agriculture, writing that "in almost all the developing countries, the rate of [public] investment dropped markedly in the 1980s, and the capital stock deteriorated."

The decline in infrastructure, agricultural, and other physical investment is attributable not only to debt service and low capital flows but to IMF policies as well. Under conditionality, the debtor country had to agree to boost its foreign trade earnings so as to generate the foreign exchange needed for debt service. This has meant sacrificing the imports required for physical investment. "The decline in imported intermediate and investment goods has had adverse long-term effects," writes the World Bank. That developing countries were forced to concentrate on exports at a time of weakening world prices for the commodities in which they specialized; that devaluation further undermined export prices and earnings; that global demand for their goods was suffering from synthetic substitutes; and that their goods had to be delivered in a raw or semi-finished state, final manufacture usually being reserved for the importing industrial nation—all these factors should have been reason not to insist on a harsh and deflationary foreign trade policy. But from the creditors' point of view, it was successful. In 1980–81, the nineteen "severely indebted" middle-income countries averaged a trade *deficit* of $4 billion; over the 1982–89 period, they averaged a $26-billion *surplus* annually. So large a surplus (in countries, by the way, whose balance of trade should have been in the red, given their stage of economic development) not only meant the virtual abandonment of import substitution, by some estimates, but by some estimates also a 15–20 percent decline in domestic per-capita availability of goods and services.

Import substitution, the economic growth strategy of Latin American countries, required a relatively large public sector, the subsidizing of vital industries, overvaluation of the currency to keep imports relatively low-priced, low interest rates and some control over capital investment, and reliance on foreign capital. Jerome Levinson, a former general counsel of the Inter-American Development Bank, has stated, "In the three decades of the 1950s through the 1970s this model [of import substitution] succeeded in creating a sizable middle class, and a strong indigenous industrial plant, particularly in Brazil and Mexico; this plant turned out to be more internationally competitive than anyone had thought possible."[15] Levinson also points to the utter neglect of issues of social equity that accompanied import-substitution policies—the failure to create a broad tax base, reliance on a capital-intensive infrastructure in the presence of large unemployed reserves of labor, highly concentrated land ownership, inadequate educational and health delivery systems, and so on. But the IMF's and World Bank's ultimately successful opposition to import-substitution strategies was unconcerned with these problems; their opposition was grounded entirely in free-trade and privatization doctrine.



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It must in fairness be conceded that numerous World Bank statements and publications are concerned with global poverty and inequality. The Bank's *World Development Report 1990: Poverty* is a work of massive facts and figures and critical observations, whose underlying message is that economic development is not sustainable without the elimination of world poverty. Yet, IMF and World Bank policies have contributed to making the eighties a "lost decade" in alleviating world poverty.

That becomes evident when we examine the IMF's insistence upon reducing budgetary deficits by client countries and the effects of such reductions on social welfare outlays. Cutbacks of budget deficits aim to restrain inflation, reduce the public-service work force and publicly owned industry, and thus narrow the reach of government. Many workers of course lose their jobs in the process. Social welfare outlays are at best to be "targeted" more "efficiently" to needy groups; they are not to affect the overall objective outlined. "Fund conditionality in its broadest sense tends to require expenditure reductions in social welfare . . . and almost never seems to require social welfare increases."

According to the World Bank, real social spending per capita on health, education, and economic support (for example, food subsidies) declined by 26 percent in sub-Saharan Africa between 1980 and 1985, and by 18 percent in Latin America. Social welfare spending is largely a function of total public spending; the total declined by 33 percent and 16 percent (after deducting interest paid on debt). The declines are not wholly attributable to IMF and World Bank policy, but they were exacerbated by it; nor has an improvement occurred since the mid-eighties. According to the *IMF Assessment Project* reductions in at least one of three social welfare expenditure categories—housing, health care, and economic services—occurred in 92 percent of forty-eight IMF-conditioned programs over the 1986–90 period; reductions in two of the three categories in 62 percent; reductions in the three combined in 67 percent. IMF conditionality "prompted reduced food subsidies at some point in a majority of countries" under IMF surveillance, with "substantial" reductions being carried out in twenty-four of them, including Argentina, Brazil, Hungary, the Philippines, India, and Poland.[16] The purpose of IMF demands that such items as food subsidies be reduced or abolished is for prices to "find their own level," which is always higher than the subsidized price. That goal, where realized, must drive more people into poverty. Much of the urban population in Latin America, reports ECLAC, "have gradually become poorer and increased in number and have also had to suffer greater overcrowding . . . , shrinking opportunities for wage-earning employment, a rate of inflation which exceeds the rate of increase in their income, and cuts in state services and subsidies." An IMF official has written that adjustment measures "seek to restrain the growth in wages," and that, although such measures may spell hardship for middle-income workers in the "formal" sector, the lowering of real wages may create job opportunities for lower-income workers.[17] That is reactionary nonsense, and underlines the poverty-inducing, deflationary effects of IMF conditionality. ECLAC notes that "urban workers have suffered an absolute decline in their income and consumption capacity. . . .[T]hey have suffered a radical reduction in real wages—in some countries by up to 50 percent—and the number of workers in modern industries has been either static or declining."

Whether implementation of IMF and World Bank adjustment policies ultimately leads to renewed economic growth is not very likely. Those who believe that it does assume, *inter alia*, that the export-based growth model pursued by such nations as South Korea, Indonesia, and Singapore can be successfully replicated, together with the financial policies that apparently ensured their success. But they forget that success depended on at times bloody repression of workers and popular movements, and upon authoritarian political systems (as also in Chile). The time of such systems as means to forcing economic growth has passed. Moreover, export-based growth presumes expanding world markets over a lengthy time span, say, twenty-five years. But the rate of expansion of world markets has been slowing,



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and the increasing output of still rising industrial capacity cannot be readily absorbed. High unemployment levels in the industrial countries clearly signal these limitations. The pessimism of the World Bank in regard to the persistence of global poverty beyond the year 2000 may also be interpreted as an indication of the low probability of success of an export-based growth strategy, inasmuch as it spells continued low consumption standards and politically and socially unacceptable income inequalities.

Privatization aggravates these inequalities. It tends to siphon the public resources needed for infrastructure and poverty relief. For example, Mexico protested the financing of private companies by one of the multilateral development banks, fearing that this shift in the emphasis of international financing would diminish the resources available for power, water, and sewerage works. Even as regards the provision of such basic necessities as food (let alone housing and health care services), privatized markets cannot be relied upon. In so thoroughly privatized an economy as that of the United States, 10 percent of the population requires food stamps.

Nevertheless, the economic model prescribed by the international financial institutions is likely to prevail for some time to come, since global capital flows to developing countries largely hinge upon how well these countries respond to the conditions imposed by them.

We cannot detail here an alternative model of economic development—one that would combine development with social equity and assign priority to eliminating poverty. The present economic order, imposing the priorities of finance capital through its political allies and politicized banking institutions, has proved unable to eliminate world poverty; its actions have deepened it. Is an economic order that tolerates this ignominy, even though some of its best defenders are ashamed, sometimes even tormented by it, sustainable? I do not believe so. □

## Notes

[1] Miles Kahler, "External influence, conditionality, and the politics of adjustment," in *The Politics of Economic Adjustment*, S. Haggard and R.R. Kaufman, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 90.

[2] *The World Bank Annual Report 1992* (Washington: The World Bank, 1992), p. 46.

[3] Barbara Stallings, "International influence on economic policy: debt, stabilization, and structural reform," in *The Politics of Economic Adjustment*, p. 78.

[4] "Effectiveness of adjustment programs," in Country Economics Department, *Adjustment Lending Policies* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 1990), p. 21.

[5] Susan George, *The Debt Boomerang: How Third World Debt Harms Us All* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992), p. 72.

[6] *World Debt Tables, 1991–92: External Debt of Developing Countries. Vol. 1: Analysis and Summary Tables* (Washington: The World Bank, 1991), p. 46.

[7] David C. Mulford, "Evolution of U.S. Development Strategy," Additional Material Submitted for the Record, in *Quota Increase of the International Monetary Fund*, Hearing before the Subcommittee on International Development, Finance, Trade, and Monetary Policy of the Committee on Banking, Finance and Urban Affairs, House of Representatives, July 10, 1991 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1991), p. 97.

[8] Liliana Rojas-Suarez, "Risk and capital flight in developing countries," in *Determinants and Systemic Consequences of International Capital Flows* (Washington: International Monetary Fund, March 1991), p. 85.

[9] Ibid., p. 89.

[10] Jeffrey D. Sachs, "Introduction," in *Developing Country Debt and the World Economy*, Jeffrey D. Sachs, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 27.

[11] Jeffrey Sachs, ibid., p. 31.

[12] Miles Kahler, *Politics of Economic Adjustment*, citing Jeffrey D. Sachs, p. 105.

[13] United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, *Changing Production Patterns with Social Equity* (Santiago, Chile, 1990), p. 19.

[14] ECLAC, p. 35.

[15] Jerome Levinson in *Quota Increase of the International Monetary Fund, op. cit.*, p. 81.

[16] *IMF Conditionality: 1980–1991* (Arlington, Va.: Alexis de Tocqueville Institution, 1992), pp. 98, 99.

[17] Peter Heller, "Fund-supported adjustment programs and the poor," in *The Path to Reform, Issues and Experiences* (Washington, D.C.: International Monetary Fund and World Bank, Sep. 1990), p. 11.



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**David Maybury-Lewis**

# THE INDIANS IN THE AMERICAS

## A Shameful History, A Modest Proposal

At the beginning of his remarkable quartet *Memories of Fire*, the Uruguayan novelist Eduardo Galeano gives this vivid description of the invasion of the Americas:

> He falls on his knees, weeps, kisses the earth. He steps forward, staggering because for more than a month he has hardly slept, and beheads some shrubs with his sword.
>
> Then he raises the flag. On one knee, eyes lifted to heaven, he pronounces three times the names of Isabella and Ferdinand. Beside him the scribe Rodrigo de Escobedo, a man slow of pen, draws up the document.
>
> From today everything belongs to those remote monarchs: the coral sea, the beaches, the rocks all green with moss, the woods, the parrots, and these laurel-skinned people who don't yet know about clothes, sin, or money and gaze dazedly at the scene.
>
> Luis de Torres translates Christopher Columbus's questions into Hebrew: "Do you know the kingdom of the Great Khan? Where does the gold you have in your noses and ears come from?"
>
> The naked men stare at him with open mouths, and the interpreter tries out his small stock of Chaldean: "Gold? Temples? Palaces? King of kings? Gold?"
>
> Then he tries his Arabic, the little he knows of it: "Japan? China? Gold?"
>
> The interpreter apologizes to Columbus in the language of Castile.
>
> Columbus curses in Genovese and throws to the ground his credentials, written in Latin and addressed to the Great Khan. The naked men watch the anger of the intruder with red hair and coarse skin, who wears a velvet cape and very shiny clothes.

This was arguably the most extraordinary meeting in the history of humankind. It reunited two portions of humanity that had been separated for forty thousand years, ever since the inhabitants of the Americas had lost touch with their Asiatic forebears. The world—both the New World and the Old World—was dramatically changed forever.

Clearly, the quincentenary of such an extraordinary event should have been remembered and marked, but how? In my view the event deserved to be remembered as an occasion for sober reflection rather than celebration, much as the holocaust in Nazi Europe is something we are constrained to remember without celebration. The analogy comes to mind not because the invaders set out to massacre the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas (sometimes they did, sometimes they did not) but because the immediate consequences of the European invasion constituted the greatest demographic disaster in human history.

We know that the Europeans brought with them a gold fever that astounded the Indians and a ruthlessness that many of the indigenous peoples discovered too late, but they also brought worse. They let pestilence loose in the Americas. In the words of a Maya chronicler, "Before . . . they [the Indians] had no sickness; they had no aching bones; they had no burning chest; they had no abdominal pain; they had no consumption; they had no headache. At that time the course of humanity was orderly. The foreigners made it otherwise when they arrived

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here." The writer continues in despair, "Let us therefore die! Let us therefore perish! For our Gods are already dead!"

Many of the Indians did die. It is estimated that by the end of the sixteenth century the indigenous population of the Americas had been cut in half. The survivors faced a future of slavery, serfdom, or forced labor, unless they were remote enough to defend themselves at the margins of European settlement.

The Spaniards were only the first of the European invaders to set about enslaving the Indians, and they did so with occasional misgivings. Bishop Bartolomé de las Casas was so appalled by the cruelties of the conquerors and the decimation of the indigenous populations that he devoted his life to the Indian cause. His monumental *Historia de las Indias* was a searing indictment of the conquistadors and is often thought to have been the work that first exposed the *leyenda negra*, or black legend, of Spanish cruelty in the New World.

Many people feared that the quincentenary of Columbus's arrival in the Americas would reopen the debate over the *leyenda negra*, with Spanish celebration of their heroic exploits being countered by indigenous insistence on the cruelties of the conquest. Fortunately, that debate has been largely avoided, and I do not propose to renew it here. I see little point in arguing over the relative cruelty of these as opposed to those conquerors. The whole process was shot through with cruelty and injustice, with suffering and, yes, heroism. That is what makes it so difficult to evaluate or even to treat dispassionately. Yet I have just called for sober reflection on the conquest, and this is what I shall attempt.

It seems to me that an important and essential aspect of that reflection has to be a consideration of what has happened to the indigenous peoples of the Americas since 1492. They tend to be the forgotten peoples of the New World. How often are they mentioned in the news stories that most of us read? In all our current preoccupation with Mexico, how often do we read about the large indigenous population of that country? When the U.S. administration was focusing on Central America, we learned little about the circumstances of the indigenous populations of the region. Even the indigenous majority in Peru received scant attention in our newspapers until it was mistakenly reported that the *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) movement was an Indian uprising.

Yet the treatment of indigenous peoples since the conquest is more than the Americas' original sin, which can now be conveniently forgotten. It is a matter of more consequence that has at times profoundly influenced the nature of modern American societies. At the very least it is intimately related to, and diagnostic of, the forces that have shaped those societies. Consider, for example, the colonial debates over the treatment of Indians. The Spanish and Portuguese monarchs occasionally passed laws protective of the Indians and their communities. Such laws usually resulted from a combination of factors. The arguments of people like Las Casas or the Marquess of Pombal, who sought to abolish Indian slavery in Portuguese America, were in the ascendant. At the same time the Iberian monarchs wanted to keep control of Indian communities and Indian labor. If these were controlled instead by powerful colonists, then a kind of feudalism was established on the other side of the Atlantic that challenged the power of the kings themselves. In fact, when the crown passed laws protective of the Indians, the colonists regularly flouted them. They could and did rebel if deprived of forced Indian labor. On one celebrated occasion, the Spanish colonists were so outraged by royal attempts to protect the Indians that the king's representative had to travel to New Spain in disguise in order to offer the royal compromise that averted outright rebellion. Similarly, when the Marquess of Pombal decreed the abolition of Indian slavery in Brazil, the colonists refused to comply. They did not see why the Jesuits should be allowed to gather Indians in their mission communities while the colonists were deprived of Indian slaves. The Marquess sent his brother to Brazil to enforce the edict, but his brother listened to the colonists and advised Pombal to abolish the Jesuits instead, which he duly did. This led to what Osvaldo Hurtado, a modern Ecuadorian



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writer and president of his country, referred to as the "institutionalized illegality of Spanish colonial society." It has much to do with a tradition that has bedeviled a number of Latin American countries: passing beautiful laws with little expectation that they will be enforced or observed.

The independence movements of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries did not change this, nor did they do much for indigenous peoples. The constitutions adopted by the newly independent republics were eloquent about the rights of man but silent about the Indians. In countries with sparse indigenous populations, such as the United States, Indians were considered to have no place in the new nation. They were thought of as the peoples beyond the frontier, in "Indian territory," a notional territory that was pushed steadily westward until it was swallowed up altogether at the end of the nineteenth century. In countries with significant indigenous populations, conservatives and liberals fought civil wars over the length and breadth of the Western Hemisphere. Their clashing visions of the future paid scant attention to Indian concerns. The conservatives demanded freedom from the mother country in order to manage their own affairs and to go on exploiting the Indians. The liberals demanded freedom for all, including the Indians, but what they meant by this for the Indians was the freedom to cease being Indian altogether. They considered *Indio* a derogatory word and Indianness a stigma—a kind of royalist, conservative, ecclesiastical device for maintaining indigenous peoples in a state of savagery. In the liberal vision of the future there would be no more Indians; the very word would be prohibited. The new constitutions therefore promised freedom and equality for all, with no mention of the Indians and no special provisions for them. It was assumed that they would disappear into the mainstream.

That hope was not fulfilled. In 1821 Simón Bolívar said at the Congress of Cúcuta that lands alienated from the Indians in Gran Colombia (corresponding roughly to modern Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, and Ecuador combined) during the tumultuous years leading up to independence should be returned to them "as soon as circumstances permit." Circumstances never did, however, either in Gran Colombia or anywhere else. On the contrary, the nineteenth century was an era of such intense pressure on the indigenous peoples of the hemisphere that it could well be referred to as the time of the second conquest.

In countries with large indigenous populations, conservatives encroached on Indian lands and maintained Indian communities in poverty as a source of labor. Liberals, on the other hand, sought to break up traditional landholdings in the interest of modernization. They therefore moved to break up the estates of the great landowners and the Church. They also moved to break up the lands held by indigenous communities, hoping to force the Indians to abandon their traditional ways and to enter the modern labor market. Both policies placed heavy burdens on the Indians, who were treated as a less than fully human labor force.

The details are revealing. In Ecuador, for example, the new constitution adopted in 1852 excluded Indians (the majority of the population) from citizenship. In 1857 slavery was formally abolished, so that black Ecuadorians were emancipated. At the same time the system of *concertaje* was institutionalized. This was the Ecuadorian version of a system that proliferated throughout the Americas. It enabled labor contractors to enter into a *concierto*, or arrangement (elsewhere referred to less euphemistically as the *enganche*, or hook) with Indians. Under this system Indians were tricked or forced into accepting contracts that they did not understand and often tried unsuccessfully to repudiate—contracts that obliged them to work for long periods of time for miserable wages or for payment in kind.

Peru relied less on such arrangements and more on taxes levied in cash and in labor directly on the indigenous population. Indians, for example, were required to work without payment to build roads and were then obliged to pay tolls to use them, although non-Indians could use the same roads at no charge. The government discovered that it could not



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manage the economy without exacting "the Indian tribute," as it was called. The tribute was nevertheless abolished at regular intervals throughout the nineteenth century. It had to be abolished repeatedly because each abolition was more theoretical than real, and Indians went on being forced to pay.

In Guatemala and El Salvador, the countries with the largest indigenous populations of Central America, the modernization policies of liberal-party dictators at the end of the nineteenth century forced Indians to carry passbooks showing that they had performed the legally required number of days of labor. Indians were thus obliged to work for starvation wages on the coffee plantations. This system has continued almost to the present day in some places, and the effects of it on Indian individuals and families are harrowingly described in the story of her life as told by Rigoberta Menchú, winner of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize.

The classic example of liberal legislation that was put into effect with modernizing intent and had extremely painful consequences for indigenous populations was the Reform Law in Mexico. This was enacted by President Benito Juárez, himself part Indian and proud of it, in 1856. It aimed to break up the great *haciendas*, the large landholdings of the Church, and the communal landholdings of the Indians. Juárez's intention was to modernize the country and especially to modernize Mexican agriculture. The result of his initiative, however, was that under Porfirio Diáz and his group of advisers, known as the *científicos* (scientists), these lands were reconcentrated in the hands of large agribusinesses, while the Indians and the rural poor sank deeply into poverty and peonage. The extraordinary concentration of land and the ever-widening gap between rich and poor were clearly two of the most important factors that caused the Mexican Revolution that broke out in 1910.

Throughout the nineteenth century, then, conservative policies squeezed the Indians, while liberal policies sought to destroy their communities. In fact, the Americas since the conquest have been a vast laboratory for the eradication of indigenous cultures. As one studies the record, one cannot help being struck by the effort and ingenuity devoted by the conquerors to this task. They attacked indigenous religions. They imposed forced labor of various kinds. They invented a whole series of ways to lure or trick those not already forced to work into peonage through debt (the debt could only be worked off—and only with difficulty). Here and there they simply abolished Indians by a stroke of the pen and followed that up by trying to break up indigenous communities. They took Indian children away from their parents, sometimes by force, to be educated in alien schools that taught them to despise the ways of their peoples and discouraged them from speaking their own languages. The assault on indigenous landholding makes for the most remarkable reading of all: it is clear that the invaders not only coveted and seized Indian lands whenever they could; they were also affronted by those peoples and communities that held their lands in common. The Europeans considered that concept the very essence of savagery, for it departed from the ideas of private property and individual title to land that were considered central to Western civilization. It was thus with a convenient conviction of moral superiority that the invaders constantly tried to break up the communal landholdings of the Indians.

This relentless effort to destroy indigenous communities led to constant Indian rebellions throughout the hemisphere. The rebellions sometimes achieved considerable local success but, being local, were invariably defeated when the imperial power had gathered sufficient force to strike back at the locality. The colonists realized that the attack on indigenous landholding was a perennial and festering source of discontent, but they persevered anyway. Thus, an edict issued in 1834 in Gran Colombia made it clear that "in no tribunal or court will complaints be heard, whose sole object is to request that Indian lands not be divided."

Indigenous peoples, then as now, clung fiercely to their lands and communities. Their societies had been decapitated, so their communities constituted the basis of their culture



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and their dignity. The alternative that the enveloping society tried to force them to accept was not very attractive. They were urged to abandon their languages and cultures and to enter the mainstream of "civilization," though in that mainstream they would be stigmatized and treated as slaves, serfs, directed workers, or peons. In the light of this history and of the five-hundred-year effort to eradicate the indigenous cultures of this hemisphere, their resilience is quite remarkable.

The effort to destroy these cultures (ethnocide) was sometimes accompanied by an attempt to destroy the indigenous populations themselves (genocide). This was an option only in the regions or countries with the sparsest indigenous populations. The classic example is Argentina, where Araucanian Indians, splendid horsemen with vast herds of cattle, dominated the pampas in the nineteenth century. In 1879–80 General Roca's campaign, known in Argentine history books as the Conquest of the Desert, was expressly intended to annihilate the Araucanians and to seize and redistribute their lands. In fact, the Araucanians were not actually annihilated, but they were thought to be. They ceased to exist socially and culturally for nearly a century. Meanwhile, real genocide was committed in the far south, where small populations of nomadic Ona and Yaghan were hunted down and killed like animals by the local sheep farmers. Most of those farmers were British expatriates, which shows (if such a demonstration is still needed) that colonial brutality is not the special preserve of any one nationality. All of this was justified in the name of civilization, progress, and the manifest destiny of Argentina to extend its rule to the southern tip of the South American continent.

A similar push to the south in Chile at the same time and for the same reasons led to the final defeat of the Chilean Araucanians. These Indians, who had stopped the Spanish conquest at the Bio-Bio River and had retained their independence through the three subsequent centuries, were defeated by the army's modern weaponry and reduced to penury and starvation. We rarely hear about them now, although there are one million of them in a total Chilean population of about fourteen million.

At the same time the United States was engaged in its own push to the West, in pursuit of its own vision of manifest destiny, and with similarly drastic consequences for the indigenous inhabitants of the "Indian territory" that was to be Indian no longer. In his book *The Winning of the West*, Teddy Roosevelt justified the conquest of the Indians in terms that probably represented the prevailing attitude of the invaders as they moved westward after the Civil War: "The settler and the pioneer have at bottom had justice on their side. This great continent could not have been kept as nothing but a playground for squalid savages."

This attitude and this process were not peculiar to the Americas. All over the world indigenous peoples were being conquered and dispossessed in the name of civilization. Because this was held to be a matter of right triumphing over wrong, no accommodation with the conquered populations was thought to be desirable, and none was sought. At best they were to be corralled and made over as despised and counterfeit copies of their conquerors; at worst they were simply to be annihilated. Meanwhile, the evolutionism and racism of the conquerors made the whole process seem inevitable.

Similar attitudes persist in our own times. They lie behind the plausible falsehoods of conventional wisdom that are still subscribed to today by otherwise reasonable people. According to such views, "tribal" or "traditional" societies are obsolescent. They cannot adjust to the modern world. They are doomed by the march of progress and must inevitably disappear. These views conveniently conceal from us the facts that these societies have shown a remarkable tenacity and resilience, and that if they are destroyed, it is not by abstract laws of history or nature but by the political choices of the powerful, by our willingness to overpower them, and by our unwillingness to live and let live.

In the Americas we, and particularly the Native Americans among us, are still coping with the consequences of the oldest European imperialism. These consequences can be seen



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in the contemporary circumstances and concerns of modern American states. Consider, for example, the contrasts between Mexico, Guatemala, and Peru, all countries with large indigenous populations.

In Mexico, after the revolution of 1910–20, an attempt was made to connect the Indians and the rural poor with the corporate state, to link them through the PRI (the Institutional Revolutionary Party) to the national life. An official ideology of *indigenismo* guided national policy toward indigenous peoples. The ideology is now much criticized by Mexican anthropologists for being paternalistic and assimilationist, something imposed by the state on the Indians. Nevertheless, in spite of its shortcomings, it produced a long period of comparative social stability in the Mexican countryside—a stability that is even more remarkable if we compare it with the experience of other American nations.

Peru, for example, had its own brand of *indigenista* ideology. Started in something like the spirit of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by writers who called attention to the sufferings of the Indians, it was given forceful expression by figures such as José Carlos Mariategui, the theorist of Peruvian socialism, and Haya de la Torre, the leader of the APRA party (the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance). They spoke of an indigenous future, not just for Peru but for the Americas. Their rhetoric was rejected and their party suppressed, while the indigenous bulk of Peru's population continued to be systematically marginalized. This accounts for the extraordinary success of the Shining Path movement. It is successful not because it is an indigenous uprising (it is not) but because it has brought Peru to the brink of chaos, due to the fact that the country had never made a sustained effort at national mobilization.

Guatemala, on the other hand, has dealt with its Indian question in a different way: through repressive violence in defense of the status quo. This serves as an object lesson, showing what can happen in a country where there has been no social revolution and little social mobilization, and where the elites harbor a fear of the Indian masses, who must therefore be terrorized in order to be kept in their place.

What is the contemporary significance of the Indian question in countries where indigenous peoples are an insignificant fraction of the total population? Consider the case of Brazil, whose indigenous inhabitants live scattered throughout the interior and constitute less than 0.5 percent of the total population. Why are their concerns treated as a matter of national security? Ostensibly, the national security doctrine has been put forward by the military to protect Brazil's extensive frontiers. We are asked to believe that peoples like the Yanomami, ten thousand strong and outnumbered and outgunned by the miners who have invaded their territory, might wish to link up with their less numerous brethren in Venezuela and form a separate state. Alternatively, the national security doctrine is said to be needed as a defense of Brazilian sovereignty because there has been wild talk in various places about internationalizing the Amazon in order to protect its ecology for the world.

In fact, the defense of indigenous rights is subversive in a different sense. When Indians protest about what is being done to them in the interior of the country, they are classed with smallholders, the landless poor, and other "troublemakers" who call into question the Brazilian model of development and call attention to the glaring injustices in Brazilian society. Meanwhile, the insistence of indigenous peoples on being allowed to maintain their own cultures is also considered subversive, for it undermines Brazil's self-image as a melting pot. In effect, Brazil's indigenous peoples are held to threaten and undermine the state simply by wishing to be themselves, by being reluctant to evaporate into the mainstream. It was therefore quite logical that until recently the Brazilian government had an official policy of "emancipating" the Indians. They were not held in servitude but were considered wards of the state. The only way the Indians could be emancipated, therefore, was if they legally gave up being considered Indian and were thus deprived of their indigenous identity.

It is one of the many ironies of the American experience that the invaders created the category of Indians, imposed it on the inhabitants of the New World, and have been trying to



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abolish it ever since. Brazil's effort to "emancipate" its Indians is only the latest in a long line of measures devised to accomplish similar ends. In many countries it was decreed that Indians would no longer be referred to as *Indios* but would instead be called *campesinos* (peasants); Indianness was thus abolished by a stroke of the pen. In Chile, General Pinochet's government tried to destroy the identity of the large Mapuche (Araucanian) minority by forcing them to divide their lands into privately owned lots. Even the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, which is widely thought to be one of the more generous settlements made with indigenous peoples, was drafted to turn Indian communities into corporations and their members into stockholders. Future members of the community will not acquire stocks unless stocks are bequeathed to them by those who originally received them. Meanwhile, stocks can soon be given, willed, or sold to people who are not members of the communities. The effect of the act, if not its intention, is to provide a mechanism for phasing out the native communities altogether.

Such measures have been justified over the centuries by arguments that are still used today. We must make hard choices between the rights of indigenous peoples and the good of the state, between stagnation and development, between progress and pluralism. Indeed, in the United States as well as in Brazil, many people are alarmed by any challenge to the idea that their nation is a melting pot. In this country the demands of indigenous peoples for the right to maintain their own cultures without being relegated to second-class citizenship are deemed deeply subversive, for it is feared that satisfaction of those demands will contribute to the tribalization of American society.

Such tribalization is held to be dangerous for two reasons: it is thought to undermine American society and culture, and it is thought to lead to interethnic conflict. The United States, the argument runs, has avoided such conflict, which we now see raging in other parts of the world, and should continue to do so by insisting on its own melting-pot tradition.

Ethnic conflict is a great and legitimate fear, but it is important to see ethnic conflict, and indeed all violence in the modern world, in context. Violence in our time—and we live, arguably, in the most violent century yet—is not especially associated with ethnic divisions that undermine the state. That kind of violence obviously does take place, but violence may also be visited by the state on its citizens. Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, and Pol Pot's Cambodia are only the most glaring examples. Alternatively, violence in a country may be comparatively unrelated to ethnic divisiveness. The United States, for example, has an extraordinarily high level of interpersonal violence in comparison with other developed countries. Canada, by contrast, has a much lower level of interpersonal violence, yet that nation's ethnic divisiveness is often held up as an example of the kind of conflict that the United States must at all costs avoid.

I think we tend to idealize the peace and social order maintained by the unitary state and to exaggerate the danger to this vision presented by permitting cultural distinctiveness or local autonomy to indigenous peoples or ethnic groups. In fact, much of the violence in the world today comes from the suppression (or attempted suppression) of ethnicity in the name of the unitary state. Two years ago a survey carried out by Cultural Survival* revealed that about 120 shooting wars were going on in the world, 90 of which involved states that were attempting to suppress ethnic minorities.

Yet even if we concede that the suppression of ethnicity can lead to as much bloodletting as its expression, ethnic divisiveness is still a legitimate concern. The issue was recently and powerfully addressed by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., in his book *The Disuniting of America*. Schlesinger admits that the traditional canon of

* Cultural Survival was founded in 1972 by Pia and David Maybury-Lewis in collaboration with social scientists from Harvard. It assists small societies and threatened minorities to defend their ways of life and advocates pluralist solutions that will permit such peoples to prosper in multicultural states. For further information about Cultural Survival's research, publications, projects, networks, and internship program, call 617-621-3818 or write Cultural Survival, 215 First Street, Cambridge MA 02142.



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American culture has reflected the traditions of only part of the country's population, excluding others and making them feel like second-class citizens. He argues, however, that the cure for this state of affairs proposed by the multiculturalists is worse than the disease. That cure includes such measures as the tendentious rewriting of history, the introduction of curricula whose main purpose is to make minorities feel good, the denial of any merit to Western civilization, the insistence on adherence to inane standards of political correctness, and the espousal of an anything-goes relativism. Schlesinger asserts, therefore, that the United States should combat multiculturalism, virtually in defense of its own sanity, and that it should insist on its own common culture, taught to its citizens through a curriculum suitably modified to be less exclusionary than before.

I agree with Schlesinger's diagnosis and his convincing exposé of the absurdities of the extreme multiculturalists. But there is no reason to throw the baby out with the bathwater because of those absurdities. I agree that the proper corrective to the traditional exclusiveness of the American canon should not be an ethnic chauvinism that replies in kind with chauvinistic countercultures. It need not, however, be a renewed insistence that the expression of ethnicity is divisive and that it should be superseded or suppressed by American civic culture. A third solution is possible: what I call *serious multiculturalism*. This corrective is based on a presumption of tolerance and a desire for mutual understanding and mutual accommodation among subcultures. Such accommodation has to be taught and learned, and it depends on a serious effort to make multicultural, multiethnic systems work. Incidentally, serious multiculturalism would require as much effort from minorities that feel they have been wronged as it would from the majority that is accused of excluding them.

Is this a hopelessly utopian vision? No more so, I suggest, than the idea of democracy. Yet we feel it is realistic to try and make democracy work. We do not give up on democracy because the Germans once elected Adolf Hitler or because of any of the other crimes that have been committed in its name. I use the analogy deliberately, for it seems to me that the countries with the best chance of making serious multiculturalism work are those that are relatively wealthy and have traditions of democracy, tolerance, and openness—countries, in fact, like the United States and Canada and Australia.

Is all this a long way from the Indian question? I do not think so. The New World dilemma was how the invaders were to deal with the indigenous populations of the hemisphere. This presented at the time of the conquest, and still presents today, a challenge to every country in the Americas. The challenge is, What kind of a country is ours? What kind of a country do we want it to be?

Nations, as Benedict Anderson so rightly put it, are imagined communities. The indigenous challenge to the United States is to make a further leap of the imagination, beyond the ideals of democracy and egalitarianism; to imagine a nation that can tolerate indigenous cultures within its pluralism; to imagine a nation that does not need to extinguish the traditions that nourish it, because it inspires in its citizens a commitment to a transcendent Americanism.

If any country in the Americas could achieve this, it would be the best possible tribute to the civilization that was imposed on the hemisphere five hundred years ago, for it would show that Western civilization was not exhausted (as its critics claim) by the waning of European hegemony. It would show instead that Western civilization is capable of renewal, of using its democratic traditions to lead the way into the multiethnic future that awaits us all. □



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# Remembering Irving Howe

*Irving Howe, founding editor of* Dissent, *died this past May. In the following pages we present thoughts, comments, and remembrances of this remarkable, versatile intellectual by his colleagues, family, and friends. Some of the longer pieces were presented originally at the memorial for him in New York on May 24, 1993.*—EDS.

## Bernard Avishai

Some time ago, in an impatient review of *Fiddler on the Roof,* Irving wrote that the people who, one by one, made up Yiddish civilization in Eastern Europe were to be mourned—not with sentimental homage—but rather with "dignified silence." We younger men and women who loved Irving, and claimed him, cannot write of his death without feeling somewhat preempted by that show of impatience. If anything was sacred to him, it was the mystery and density of a good man's life. How do you eulogize a person you imagine poised to pounce on the slightest oversimplification?

You remember, I suppose, that certain things *were* sacred to him. Just after *A Margin of Hope* was published, I found Irving exasperated because a neoconservative critic had mocked him for a socialist position that had, in the words of the critic, become a "religion" for him. "The annoying thing is that the observation is, in a way, right," Irving told me (his anger turned to exasperation when it collided with his sense of irony); "but I don't think this man can appreciate any longer *how* he is right." It was not that *Dissent*'s politics reflected any canon, certainly not any faith in the course of history. Rather, it was that the socialist ideal, with all of its nuances and limits, had to be grounded in the desire to do right by another person. This desire was, Irving lamented, "mysterious." You could not argue Bounderby into *wanting* Stephen Blackpool's welfare.

Of course, intense fellow-feeling can be a mixed blessing. It can prompt guilt (and the excesses of guilt) almost as quickly as generosity. As far as I could judge it, Irving made his peace by focusing on kindnesses that were practical, as much in his friendships as in his work. He was not always there with the praise you wanted; he was almost always there with the help you needed, help with a job search, a letter, an opinion—a drink. Nor were kindnesses lost on him. I recall traveling with him and Ilana to Washington back in 1979; they met me in Penn Station late, at odds. Suddenly Ilana left us standing in the middle of the platform—only to return a few minutes later with a bag full of rolls. "When people are angry, you buy food," she said. No pilgrim to Lourdes ever looked more enchanted than Irving at that moment.

A final point about missing him. Irving was a man of many arguments, but I shall miss, more than the conclusions he drew, the way he drew them. Reading Irving *calmed* me: no other writer except for Orwell has had this effect. Look at his essays on T.E. Lawrence, or Mailer, or Alec Nove. You find "some" instead of "all," "a certain" (as in "a certain gallantry") instead of a more categorical adjective, a rhetorical question when he might have permitted himself some stridency. His voice suggested what he once called (describing another's voice) "moral tact." Indeed, arresting phrases like that—"moral tact," "dignity of emotion," "heroism of tiredness"—were themselves groundwork for his "religious" sort of radicalism. They suggested, insistently but gently, that so long as writers can pair words unexpectedly, new worlds are possible and orthodoxy is futile.

Once, I was on a panel with him, and he chided me afterward that my talk had lacked a center. "It had what Henry James called a 'misplaced middle,' " he laughed. That is what we all have now.



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## Joanne Barkan

I first encountered Irving during merger negotiations between his political organization, the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, and mine, the New American Movement. It was 1979, and among NAM's ex-New Leftish, Gramsci-loving negotiators, Irving was known as the leader of *their* social democratic right wing. Over the next decade, he and I became official comrades (the merger did take place), collaborators when I joined *Dissent*'s board, and then, to my delight, friends. In reality, we had no political scores to settle. I had never been a sixties hardliner, and Irving (the socialist) had never been a social democrat.

I've tried to describe to people who didn't know Irving or *Dissent* what it was like to work with him and what he meant to me. They inevitably tag him as a superb mentor. At first this surprised me; I'd never thought of Irving as a mentor. But if the term refers to someone who takes up residence in your mind as an unfailing interlocutor, as a touchstone, then Irving was indeed a mentor. When I finished reading an essay or novel, I wondered what he'd say about it. I wrote with his editing pen in mind (around *Dissent,* who didn't?), and each article became a one-way contest to see how little he would change or cut.

I eventually learned to argue with him, which meant learning to argue more sharply in general. It was a question of conversational survival with Irving: you had to get the idea out clearly and quickly—the window of opportunity stayed open for about two sentences before his edgy mind raced on. It was a pleasure to watch him make political judgments. He moved with such agility from principle—democracy, equality, the dignity of the individual—to specific determination. True, I watched with the eye of an admirer, but I believe that only the morally impaired could have failed to recognize Irving's integrity.

Some people labeled him "difficult to please." He had high standards, and if he didn't like a piece of work, his criticism was frank. But if he liked something, he let you know just as quickly. And when he called someone's manuscript for *Dissent* "terrific!" or "first rate!" (it did happen), he sounded like a fan at a ball game—"Yes! That's one for *us*!"

Irving reveled in good writing wherever he saw it, and if he believed he could get its producer for *Dissent,* he recruited with zeal. I never heard him undercut his praise for talent with words of rivalry or resentment. He was secure enough to admire freely.

Irving made himself available. He cultivated newcomers and old-timers one on one. He encouraged, and he prodded: write more often, write something more ambitious, do some serious reading. He kept tabs on friends; if you didn't get in touch for a while, he would. This enterprise took time—even for someone whose efficiency was almost frightening. Irving understood the preciousness of time, and he was generous.

There's a paradox here. Irving was generous with his time and aggressively impatient. Around someone who spoke too long, too slowly, who made irrelevant remarks or flat-footed jokes, Irving looked ready to jump out of his skin. His hands chopped the air, he twisted in his chair, he stared at his wristwatch. Others might feel the same impatience. Irving performed it.

But there were also times when he was wonderfully at ease. On a balmy June evening a couple of years ago, another *Dissent* editor and I had dinner with Irving and then walked him home. We strolled, chatting and enjoying the perfect weather. When we arrived at Irving's building, he wanted to talk some more, so he walked us to the next corner. We stood there for a while, talking, and still talking, we walked Irving back to his door. It could have gone on and on.

It was supposed to go on and on—and this is why the word "mentor" stills feels insufficient, too cramped, for Irving Howe. The mentor-mentored liaison is defined in part by its limited duration. Sooner or later, the mentored moves on. The relationship between Irving and his coworkers, his comrades, was not meant to end. We shared socialist values, we committed ourselves to a political project, we worked in a movement. For Irving, this required lifetimes, his and ours.

I wasn't ready to say goodbye. I miss him fiercely—mentor, comrade, friend.



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## Daniel Bell

I first met Irving Howe ca. 1938–39 in Alcove No. 1 at City College, the sandbox of radical politics. Revolutionary questions, from the theoretical to the practical, convulsed the Alcove: would the capitalist class peacefully surrender power if the working class won an electoral majority; was "bourgeois democracy" a sham; how could one organize a revolutionary insurrection since there were no cobbled streets in New York, as there had been in Paris in 1789.

Irving was then a Trotskyist. Still Horenstein (in class), he was using the party name of Hugh Ivan. This was part of the romanticism of the time. After all, Ulyanov had become Lenin, Bronstein transfigured as Trotsky, Dzhugashvili metamorphosed as Stalin, and so on, and so on. Why Hugh Ivan? H and I as the transposition of initials? Or Hugh for the English gentleman that Irving absorbed from the novels he read and Ivan as the Russian muzhik, the earthy peasant they all admired? I was not, then, very friendly with Irving. I was a right-wing social democrat, a Menshevik opposed to the Bolsheviks. Irving was then a commissar of the revolution and the "theoretician" of the Trotskyists.

Irving was concerned primarily with a gathering split (splits are, after all, the only permanent revolution on the left) with the "Shermanites," a group that was beginning to question and pull away from Trotskyism. Sherman was Philip Selznick, later the professor of sociology at Berkeley. And others were "Martin Lewis," or Seymour Martin Lipset, professor at Columbia, Berkeley, Harvard, Stanford, and other places; "Martin Eden" was Martin Diamond, the Straussian professor of political philosophy who suffered an untimely death more than a decade ago; Earl Rabb (who directed Jewish organizational affairs in San Francisco and co-authored a number of books with Lipset); and Irving Kristol, who later mugged all the liberals so that they should understand reality. Rabb and Kristol took the party names of "Perry" and "Ferry," because James P. Cannon, the maximum leader of the Trotskyists, used to denounce the petty-bourgeois students from City College as being (in his inimitable pronunciation) on the "perry-ferry" of the movement. The interesting fact was that almost all the Shermanites were Jewish, and therefore took gentile party names. The only one who was not, Peter Rossi, took a Jewish party name, Rosenblatt. There was also Melvin J. Lasky, who became the editor of *Encounter*. But he was, then as now, a party of one, or rather, two halves of one, half Trotsky and half Lasky.

I had joined the Young People's Socialist League in 1932, at the tender age of thirteen. Along with Isadore (Jack) Rader, I was moving "left," until some anarchist cousins, appalled at the thought, gave me some pamphlets by Emma Goldman ("The Truth About the Boylshiviki" [sic!]) and Alexander Berkman about the Kronstadt uprising in 1920, when Trotsky had ordered the shooting of the gallant sailors whose first volleys had, earlier, initiated the Russian revolution. At City College, I would flash my steel at the Trotskyists and shout: What about Kronstadt? And they would reply: Where's Kronstadt? Irving knew. And he defended Trotsky's action as "historical necessity."

I go into these details not only for their intrinsic interest, as footnotes to the history of the New York intelligentsia, but to show how the japes and debates in this little hothouse played themselves out later on the wider shores of American social science and culture—especially since each of us, later, edited magazines.

In these disputes, especially between Irving and the Shermanites, citations, footnotes, and arcane instances (for example, the "crucial" debate at the Tenth Party Congress of the Russian party, where Lenin denounced Shliapnikov and attacked "left-wing communism" as "an infantile disorder") were exchanged furiously. And, at the end of these convoluted logomachies on strategy and tactics, the crushing retort in the factional debates was always: "You know what Trotsky has to do. And I know what Trotsky has to do. But does Trotsky know what he has to do?" In the end, he did not. Trotsky lost, and we had the gruesome victory of Stalin. But would Trotsky have been better? Ah. We are now back at City College. Remember Kronstadt!

Aficionados will recognize in all this "the Bead Game," and in this, Irving became Magister Ludi, the master of the play. The analogy, however, is not meant just as City College repartee, for what Joseph Knecht learned, in Herman Hesse's novel, was a measure of humility and, as the necessary condition for maturity, a sense of tragedy.

A number of years ago, after Irving and I had become good friends, and sometime political allies, I said to him: Irving, I am less interested in *what*



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people say, what ideas they hold, but the *way* in which they hold their ideas. Temperament of individuals, I said, is more important than ideology. I had never believed in the monolithic image of "the Bolshevik." The leaders of the Hungarian revolution of 1956, such as Imre Nagy, had been communists. Who becomes a Dubcek and who becomes a Ceausescu is not dictated by ideology but by temperament. The writer Irving admired most, Ignazio Silone, had broken with the Communist party (as exemplified in that fine novel *Bread and Wine*) because of his understanding of personal sin, as against his erstwhile comrade, Palmiro Togliatti, who remained a Stalinist. Silone's essay, "The Choice of Comrades," which Irving printed in *Dissent,* elaborated that point.

Recalling many of our old debates, and his changed political views, Irving once asked: What about me? And I replied: Irving, you are one of the few people I know, not only whose ideas, but whose temperament, changed. And it had. No longer a commissar. (And not, in reaction, a yogi; and no longer Herr but Knecht.) Just a *mensch*. A sweet *mensch*.

## David Bensman

Irving Howe invited me to write for *Dissent* in 1972, when I was a graduate student. My main qualification was my participation in a socialist youth group. This was one of *Dissent's* first moves toward generational reconciliation, but given my membership in a family of *Dissent*niks, it was a tentative one.

My assignment was to write about interesting articles in other magazines; my mission, which Irving never spelled out, was to find my political voice against the backdrop of New Left sentimentality and neoconservative heresy.

Writing for the magazine of my fathers seemed like an act of hubris, or at least, chutzpah. In an effort to be fair and generous, or perhaps sophisticated, I filled my writing with circumlocutions and apologies. Each quarter, when I found the envelope with Irving's editing in my mailbox, I was filled with terror. It was not just fear of outright rejection; I also knew that Irving's black marks would make my voice far more definite than I had dared to be, and I feared not being able to live with what he had made of my cautious efforts. Mostly his work took the form of slash marks that sharpened my points and intensified my arguments by excising the excess verbiage. Rarely did Irving write much, but when he did, his one or two sentences extended my arguments in ways that I had only been grasping at. I knew that Irving's editing made my essays livelier, more interesting, more readable, but I wasn't always sure that I completely agreed with the argument I had made with his help. In the end, I found it was far more comfortable to make my own arguments clear than to have Irving do it for me.

Simply making sense of Irving's black marks was the best education I ever received in writing and thinking clearly. During the 1970s and 1980s, dozens of my friends on the left benefited from the same education.

Equally important, Irving taught us young socialists what it was to be an intellectual—not only to take ideas seriously, but to take on the responsibility of trying to understand how our world was changing. All the time we were in graduate school and serving our apprenticeships as assistant professors, academia pressured us to narrow our field of inquiry, formalize our presentations, bury our ideas in a welter of detail. Irving through his writing, his editing, and his very conduct of *Dissent* editorial board meetings, helped us resist this academicization by giving us confidence that our steady work was possible and would make a difference.

Through Irving's efforts, *Dissent* has succeeded in making a generational transition that seemed impossible two decades ago. At the same time, without Irving, *Dissent,* and indeed the democratic left, will never be the same.



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## Marshall Berman

The hymns of praise that followed Irving's death overlooked one of his most special qualities: his capacity to change and grow, at a time of life—his fifties and sixties—when most people stagnate or shrink. But we can't appreciate his growth without facing some of his other qualities that needed to be outgrown. I want to focus on Irving in the late 1960s and early 1970s: before he grew, and after.

Before he outgrew, Irving acted out, and some of his most extravagant acting out was aimed at my generation. In 1965, he brought out an essay called "New Styles in Leftism," an assault on the New Left. Before and after it ran in *Dissent,* he went on tour and gave it at colleges around the country (I heard it at Harvard in the spring, and at the New School in the fall). This talk drew big crowds and strong responses; talk reached the shouting level within a couple of minutes, and stayed that way for hours; people screamed at and denounced old allies, felt betrayed, discovered that they couldn't work together after all. Irving claimed to be speaking on behalf of sober rationality, but in fact he was striking deep emotional chords and raising the temperature of political discourse to a frenzy. (Events soon drove the fever even higher, but he did more than his share to keep it up.) His essay is commonly and correctly listed as an opening salvo in the great American "Culture Wars" that still rage on today.

"New Styles in Leftism" says two things: (1) The New Left is wrong to be obsessed with style; (2) The New Left has THE WRONG STYLE. Thesis 1 was absolutely right. Obsession with *echt*-radical style often estranged us from our deepest values: people who were really kindred spirits tore each other to pieces over how they dressed and danced and what they smoked, and over who was really "truly radical," to the amusement of the *mamzers* who ran the world. But Irving seemed not only to lose touch with insight number one, but to become the sort of person he unmasked, a man obsessed with style. He seemed complacently happy in a world of thesis 2, where only people with THE RIGHT STYLE were allowed to play. For the next few years, *Dissent* seemed to care more about somebody flying a Vietcong flag at a mass antiwar demonstration than about what American guns and bombs were actually doing to Vietnam. This struck me as tragic, rather than just dumb, because Irving was so smart, and his own insight into thesis 1 should have skewered all the varieties of thesis 2, including the ones he seemed to embrace. I kept up my student subscription, but Dissent was hard to read. I remember saying, bitterly, that it should be renamed *The Joy of Sects*.

But then Irving outgrew and overcame. In the October 1971 *Dissent,* he published an essay called "What's the Trouble? Social Crisis, Crisis of Civilization, Both?" A lunky title, a complex piece, not reducible to sound bites, never reprinted, but maybe the best thing he ever wrote. Here, instead of dissing the New Left and the counterculture, as he had done for years, Irving tried to locate us in modern history's long waves. The mood of "What's the Trouble?" is reflective rather than polemical. If there is any polemic in it, it is directed at unnamed people in Irving's own circle "who, in the name of plebeian solidity, minimize the significance of the new youth styles," and who think the late-sixties counterculture is "unique to disoriented or spoiled middle-class youth." Against them, Irving insists not only on the pervasiveness of youth rebellion—yes, even in the working class—but on its seriousness:

> There are overwhelming cultural or pseudo-cultural experiences shared by the young of all classes, certainly more so than in any previous society. Movies, rock music, drugs . . . increasingly do create a generational consciousness that, to an undetermined extent, disintegrates class lines.

This idea—that mass media and drugs could shape consciousness and disintegrate class identities—would have been commonplace (indeed, would not even have been noticed) in a paper like the *Village Voice*. But when Irving said it in the very different context of *Dissent,* he was addressing a founders' generation then in its fifties and sixties, and pointing out "overwhelming experiences" that it was refusing to face. He was arguing very hard not only against his readers' grain, but (note that verbal emphasis, "increasingly *do* create . . .") against his own.

Back then, there were several older intellectuals out there who insisted on the primacy of mass media in contemporary life: Marshall McLuhan, Leslie Fiedler, Susan Sontag, Charles Reich, Herbert Marcuse. But their angle was that "the kids," the younger generation that had grown up on television,



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were uniquely whole, free human beings, liberated from the hangups of the literate (as in "The kids don't need Shakespeare and Freud," etc., etc.). Irving was as scornful of this *narishkeit* as he was of the hate campaigns against "the kids" whipped up by the Nixon White House.

He argued that the youthful extravagances of the 1960s showed, not that "the kids" were out of the civilized mainstream, but precisely that they were *in* the mainstream:

> Some of the more spectacular symptoms of disaffection we are now witnessing ought to be taken not as historical novelties revealing the special virtue or wickedness of a new generation, but as tokens of that continuity of restlessness and trouble that comprises the history of Western consciousness since the late 18th century.

Irving then discusses the modern welfare state. A state like this is not only a triumph of state-building, but an achievement of "Western consciousness," and a great leap forward in human history. But even at its best, he says—and the USA is a long way from its best—a welfare state inevitably undercuts itself. This is because it is

> unstable enough to encourage the militant arousal of previously silent groups, the intensification of political discontents, and the reappearance, if in new and strange forms, of those tormenting "ultimate questions" with which modern man has beset himself for a century and a half. These "ultimate questions" as to man's place in the universe, the meaning of his existence, the nature of his destiny—that they now come to us in modish or foolish ways is cause for impatience or polemic. But we would be dooming ourselves to a philistine narrowness if we denied that such questions do beset human beings, that they are significant questions, and that in our moment there are peculiarly urgent reasons for coming back to them.

Suddenly Irving had shifted and deepened the focus of political thought, to explore "those tormenting ultimate questions" about "the meaning of existence." We all must face these questions, he says, and ask—in the words of the great 19th-century Russian writers, and in Irving's own italics—*"How shall we live?"* At the climax of this essay, Irving highlights Dostoevsky and his meditation on the idea of "The Golden Age": it can never be realized in the world, yet without it, everyday life in the world can mean nothing at all. At the essay's end, Irving insists that "the effort to force men into utopia leads to barbarism." But then, at the *very* end, he affirms that "to live without the image of utopia is to risk the death of the imagination."

This essay marked a creative breakthrough. Irving had spent years fighting the New Left, which was even more furious in its own fighting; but now that the New Left had eaten itself up, and clearly wasn't coming back, Irving not only could see how valuable our movement had been, but could say what it ultimately *meant* in greater clarity and depth than any of us had ever been able to say it. The New Left came into being not to promote a lifestyle, but to confront the most urgent spiritual question, *How shall we live?* In the New Left's early days, that was clear to many of us. (See the 1962 SDS Port Huron Statement.) But amid the war, the riots, the splits, the assassinations, "the tormenting ultimate questions" that brought our movement to life got buried in the mess our lives became. It wasn't just that Irving was reminding us why *we* were out there; he was generous enough to admit that we had reminded him of why *he* was out there. True, he could only see the light after our star died; but it was impressive that he could see it and say it at all. As the New Left disintegrated, Irving grasped its deepest drive and reason for being, and he internalized that drive and that reason and made them his own. He overcame the spiritual complacency that drove his 1960s life as a hit man, and grew into a spiritual urgency that gave him new substance and depth.

"What's the Trouble?" is not only a fusion of deep thinking and deep feeling, but a brilliant speech-act, a rich and complex work of communication. It helped transform *Dissent* from a sectarian base into an open political and cultural space, where democratic socialists who really meant it and survivors of the New Left—the Slightly Used Left, I used to call us then—could talk and listen and think and learn from each other, and have arguments without walking out, and imagine a golden age. It lifted Irving from a fighter to a leader.



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Paul Berman

What was the source of Irving's distinctive prose style? The lyricism that you find in *World of Our Fathers,* the tender and quizzical humor in that book, the immigrant pathos that manages to remain light, and the lightness that manages to be sorrowful—where did those peculiar and appealing qualities come from? In the days after Irving died, some of his friends, in a slightly testy mood, fell to arguing with one another, and the origin of his lyrical prose was a main issue of contention. I found myself insisting that a feeling of solidarity with downtrodden people—socialism, in short—was the inspiration for Irving's style. But a friend replied, a little curtly: no, you fool, his lyricism was of the pure Yiddish variety, and Jewishness was his inspiration.

Another friend has dug up the transcript of a radio discussion in which Irving himself touched on this question—though Irving's commentary was, as befits a literary critic, mostly about the work of another writer. The discussion was broadcast over Yale University Radio, and the other writer was Isaac Bashevis Singer, who shared the microphone. The transcript of their conversation was published in the June/July 1973 issue of *Midstream*. It was a chat between socialism and Jewishness. Singer observed that true Yiddishists never regarded his own stories and novels as part of their tradition, and he himself was happy to accept their view. He said, "I consider myself a writer in the Jewish tradition but not exactly the Yiddish tradition." And Irving, listening to this, asked Singer to explain what he meant by distinguishing between Jewish and Yiddish.

The conversation went on:

**Singer:** The Yiddish tradition, in my mind, is a tradition of sentimentality and of social justice. These are the two pillars, so to speak, of the Yiddish kind of emotions. They are always for the underdog, very much so, and they are always sentimental. When I began to write I already felt that this kind of tradition is not in my character. I am not a sentimental person by nature. By sentimental, I mean really sentimental; let's call it schmaltz as it should be called. Neither is it my nature to fight for social justice although I am for social justice. But since I am a pessimist and I believe that no matter what people are going to do it will always be wrong and there will never be any justice in this world, I have in my own way given up. And because of this I had to create my own kind of tradition.

**Howe:** So that, in creating your own tradition, you feel that you went back to sources in Jewish lore and in Jewish thought which precede historically the rise of Yiddish literature.

**Singer:** That is exactly how I feel because according to the Bible and even the Talmud, God really resented that He created man. . . . In a way, I'm not far from the Buddhist and Indian way of thinking that the best thing you can do is run away from evil, not fight it, because the moment you begin to fight evil, you become a part of evil yourself.

**Howe:** That's the most interesting thing that's come out in a long time in regard to your own views. It certainly makes clear, although you write in Yiddish and have a marvelous Yiddish style, why the Yiddishist writers feel that in some ways you are a stranger in their midst.

**Singer:** It is true. Yiddishism was very much influenced by socialism. Yiddishism is actually a very young movement. It's only about 70 or 80 years old. It was influenced by Karl Marx and by all the so-called social dogooders. Somehow, when I was young, I already saw the bad results of these good deeds. I have seen young people go to Soviet Russia and disappear there. All these illusions and all these vain hopes. I compared them to the people who believed in Sabbatai Zevi, they were just as honest in their own way, just as zealous, and just as disappointed.

**Howe:** So it looks in a paradoxical way, although you write in Yiddish and I write in English, that I am closer to the Yiddishist tradition than you are, even though you were brought up in that world and I was not.

**Singer:** I think so because you write your articles in *Dissent,* you still have hope that by your dissent and by the dissent of some other people like you, you can change things. I have lost this illusion.

**Howe:** I don't *always* have that hope, I have it sometimes.

**Singer:** Yes, but sometimes.

Reading that transcript, you can see why so many people, not just Irving's personal circle, have felt upset by his death. Irving had a genius for being gloomy and optimistic at once, downcast and cheerful, cutting and sentimental (though he must



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have cringed when Singer leaned into the Yale microphone and not only used the word "sentimental" but twisted the nasty knife with his insistence on "schmaltz"). And that genius of Irving's was not just a personal trait, and its original home was not in English. His lyricism *was* a Yiddish inspiration; and the Yiddishism and the socialism were the same.

Who will be able to write a prose like his in the future? Naturally those of us who were Irving's friends and comrades will try to hold his example in mind, and when we sit down to do our own writing, we will sneak a glance at his books or at back issues of *Dissent*, and glancing at those old writings of his will do us good. But we won't be able to write the way he did. English, for most of us, is not just our mother language, it is our only language, and to draw from that other culture, the one that is gone, is not in our power, or in anyone's.

## Paul Booth

Conventional obituaries of Irving Howe list the New Left as one of the misguided groups he attacked, and from which he differentiated his brand of socialism.

Communism and the other failed visions on the list are of only historical interest, unlike the New Left, whose alumni are active and influential today. Myself included. In the early days of Students for a Democratic Society, I used to be singled out in Irving's polemics.

Irving and his generation saw the virtue in bringing out points of political difference. That's a lost virtue today. We who devote our energies to social change are most comfortable with accentuating areas of agreement, not differences.

The differences we had, the really important ones, we debated sharply and publicly: for example, should the Mississippi Freedom Democratic party accept or reject the compromise that would have unseated the regular delegation to the 1964 Democratic National Convention and seated two honorary MFDP delegates? Should there be negotiations with the NLF or simply withdrawal from Vietnam? Let us credit Irving Howe for engaging in them with us and recognize that these were fraternal disputes. These disputes were "learning experiences."

This is not a piece of nostalgia for lost polemics. I can do fine without them. But I'm not sure how well I can do without Irving Howe, because he focused so sharply on what was important; some of which I could see then, some of which I can see better now.

Goodbye, Irving. Thank you.

## Menachem Brinker

I met Irving for the first time in Israel during the summer of 1974. Ilana, his wife, introduced me to him, during a meeting with several friends, all peace activists.

Our very long conversation that summer initiated a twenty-year dialogue. In 1974 I was a member of a small peace party, "Moked," and was preparing to publish a new monthly, *Emda*. My goal was to unite the factions of the Zionist peace camp and to clarify and defend our positions publicly.

Irving immediately involved himself in our problems. While presenting his well-founded objections to small-party politics, he fully supported the journal. He argued that intellectuals should join the Labor party in order to lead it to more radical positions. We rejected his recommendation. I asked him if he would join the Democratic party in order to lead it "from within."

It was only with the establishment of Peace Now, the large and influential protest movement, in 1978, that Irving became convinced that other paths, outside Labor party politics, were open. He himself became a strong supporter of Americans for Peace Now.

The argument that we carried on in 1974 set the structure for our talks in the future. Our conversations extended beyond the issue of peace in the Middle East to literature, socialism, philosophy, and every other subject that interested us. To me, Irving will always be the older and secular rabbi, drawing on his vast experience and well-earned prestige. I remained the curious attentive follower, eager to



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learn from the experience and views of the mature sage, but also fond of occasionally teasing him.

And Irving was a sage. I always wondered at the mixture of elements that formed him: firm views and unambiguous sympathies and antipathies on political and social issues. Yet, his tastes in literature were liberal. As a critic, he never argued with novelists. He applied to fiction the comparative attitude of the wine connoisseur, interested in merits and achievements much more than faults and weaknesses.

He was open and receptive not only to different forms of fiction and criticism, but also to different human moods, outlooks, and attitudes represented in fiction. He described them with understanding and empathy.

Despite this openness, two attitudes were unacceptable to Irving: sheer cynicism and fatalism. His commitment to define the intersecting points between the artist's aesthetic and moral sensibilities, the conditions of social existence and the demands of radical politics determined not only his field of study but also his own critical outlook.

During his last years, Irving felt that he had become estranged from the younger generation of political activists. How many of them took their inspiration from fiction or poetry? In one of our last meetings in Paris, I tried to reconcile him to thinkers we call today "postmodernist." "This is a philosophy," he said, "of a gray and wearisome historical period, when no one believes any longer in fundamental changes in life." I realized then that he still believed in transcending "our historical epoch" with a wholly different one. I sensed that there was a deep conviction here, which I cannot help but call religious.

Visionary of a moral-social revolution that had not occurred, he refused to yield an inch. Always speaking of political usefulness and expediency, he actually remained a lonely moralist. Friend of the "masses," he was never able to follow them in giving up revolutionary ideals. He maintained his singular integrity, even if this—in his own image—made him irrelevant to influential movements and trends.

At the end, he became more and more immersed in the elementary, not to say, primitive, powers of the creation of beauty in literature and other arts. This year, in February when I saw him for the last time, he spoke very briefly about Israeli politics and *Dissent*. Suddenly he turned to me and said "Enough of socialism and peace." He asked whether I thought that Boris Eikhenbaum, the Russian formalist critic, was correct in his analysis of Tolstoy's achievement of extraordinary vividness in the depiction of the last days and death of old Bolkonsky. We discussed this issue for two hours. And then this unsentimental man of letters said, "One does not have to be afraid of full retirement and old age as long as one can still read Tolstoy."

I do not wish to mislead the reader. Aestheticism too was an intellectual attitude as impossible for Irving as full-fledged cynicism or fatalism (with or without God). Yet, I would not hesitate to say that it was the love of the creative in literature and art that ultimately was the driving force in Irving's life.

New York for me was like Nineveh, "an exceedingly great city for God" and man, full of charms. With the death of Irving, it has lost its greatest attraction.

## David Bromwich

I met Irving Howe in 1970; I had written a review of a book about campus radicals and sent it unsolicited to *Dissent;* a few days later a postcard came back that was not a rejection, not a formal letter of some kind, but a postcard from Irving Howe in Truro saying it was good work: he couldn't use it since a review of the book was already commissioned, but would I like to write something for *Dissent*—on some movies about campus radicals, if I was interested in movies? That was a lucky hit for both of us; there was nothing at that time that interested me more. We met at the end of the summer at his apartment on Riverside Drive, and I don't remember much of our conversation, most of which must have turned on politics, but at one point after hearing a string of allusions and prejudices he said, "You're a literary critic!" The tone was as if to say, How amazing and interesting that literary critics are still coming into the world. A touch of irony was in it along with the warmth of palpable pleasure; a blend very common in Irving, and also unique to him.

In the next few years I would see him on occasional visits to the city, often at editorial meetings of *Dissent,* where he was the presiding energy. You could have made a decent chamber of parliament for a small European country from the



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talents and the voices at those meetings. The senior members of the group (some of whom Irving admired tremendously, hiding his veneration with gruff command and efficiency) spoke not just in periods but paragraphs; they were earnest in their grasp of history and precedent, fierce in their expectations of each other, and had built their convictions on a solid footing of information that seems as impressive as ever looking back. Irving was not the most eloquent speaker on these occasions, but he was the sharpest—the most concentrated and the cause of concentration in others. He was a good interrupter, a skirmisher, as he remained to the last on one whole side of his writings. Pomposity in his presence lost half its heart before it could even stand on tip-toe and raise its hand. I don't know if Irving would ever have said that he lived for these gatherings with political friends and associates—many of whom began by having in common chiefly their separate friendships with him—but this was a company in which he seemed to me totally alive. It turned his wit to humor, his nervous demand on himself to a thriving gregariousness.

When we talked it was usually about literature—mostly literature written in English, owing to my limitations, not his. I decided to write a book about William Hazlitt, the great romantic critic, essay-writer, and political journalist. Did the choice have anything to do with Irving?—his energy and example, and the atmosphere of passion and belief one naturally associated with him? At the time I wouldn't have said so; but there surely was some connection. I used to type out passages of Hazlitt's prose and send them with letters to Irving about other things. The idea was to entertain him (not always an easy thing to do), to prove that I was hard at work, and also I'm sure to inspire envy. On the last count it worked. How he loved those long quotations, and how he railed against them! "You know, when you read Hazlitt you sometimes feel there's no point in writing anything further. It's unnerving." One night on the phone he said, "I've discovered Hazlitt's secret." With the average ingenious reader, a candidate for the secret might be, "Every other word is a pun in Greek," but what Irving told me was: "He always says a thing twice, he doesn't let the other guy rest; he comes back for a second punch as hard as the first, maybe harder." This was presented as a piece of empirical science, which doubtless it was not, but what an appropriate discovery it was, considering from whom it came.

The eulogies I have read all speak of his "steadiness"; the word is his, from the fine unglamorous title *Steady Work,* and what the writers mean by steadiness is consistency of opinion. This was a deep virtue, and a public one: for the causes he stood with, Irving had an astounding patience. I remember just as much his impatience—a protective trait in part, helping to keep him clear of sham artists, intellectual nuisances, or the fag-end of a conversation trailing off in gossip. His impatience was also a form of temperamental resistance: it stemmed from the difficult contact he wanted to maintain between his imaginative reach and his moral commitments. He was impatient with Emerson, whose idea of self-reliance seemed an impossible match for American socialism, in any possible world. Then he went back and reread "Self-Reliance," and a lot of other essays, and then like an intellectual he wrote a book about his ambivalence—a patient book that was still changing its mind when he finished it. We argued a long time about the famous passage that starts with the question, "Are they my poor?" Of course, Irving knew that Emerson knew that someone like Irving Howe would be reading those words one day—they were an unabashed incitement, absolutely geared to set him off. His first impulse was not to rise to the bait; but the sheer pleasure of being unpredictable had its limits, and he observed that the sentences in question, while they possessed a certain astringency, also betrayed a pinched quality of Emerson's social imagination. Seeing the comment in manuscript I offered a defense: that the defiant words against philanthropy had their motive in a hatred he should admire, hatred of the very idea of turning conscience into a drudge. Irving heard out this apology, but he wouldn't have it, or not all of it. "There's something there that grates, and it's meant to. You can't explain it away." His stake in the argument, it later occurred to me, was a piety so instinctive and personal as to be an inseparable condition of his life. No *thinker* (he believed) ought to permit himself to spin out a train of thought that could plausibly be taken to justify selfishness.

Nobody knew better how to keep to himself. He had a great gift for friendship and he had the gift (he wouldn't have called it a burden) of solitude. The photographs on his books tend to place him in a sociable light—at the blackboard, on the telephone—so one imagines a room with him in it must have been a room full of people holding forth. Another picture comes back to me, of quite a different kind, from the year he spent at Yale sharing college quarters with Nick. We went out to a party



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one evening and Irving dutifully came along. The room was crowded with graduate students and professors, few of whom he knew—I must have introduced one or two, but they didn't stay with him long; and a few minutes later I noticed Irving standing in a characteristic attitude, some way back from the refreshment table where everyone was clustered, his attention mildly taken up by the sounds of murmuring and laughter, as if they were sounds a long way off; his hands marking time in the air like a man conducting an orchestra, as if the people there and the mood they shared were in that moment entirely satisfying to him.

There are writers who are unimaginable as persons; writers who when you meet them surprise or disappoint, from the obvious disparity between the words and their ostensible cause; and writers who live so close to the pulse of their work that one hardly feels a transition in passing from the words to the man who wrote them. Socrates in the *Phaedrus* speaks of the good of "words founded on knowledge, words which can defend both themselves and him who planted them, words which instead of remaining barren contain a seed whence new words grow up in new characters." Socrates was attacking the pretensions of writing, all writing, and he appealed instead to the nobility of spoken thoughts, the give and take of people whose community aimed at a different kind of permanence. It is true that the scandal and the charm of writing is that the words are dead on the page—that, literally, they can't give an account of themselves, any more than they can change their minds. But there have been writers, a few, in reading whom one feels that one is encountering words that do defend themselves; because the words come out of a life of speaking and listening, and create for others a fresh possibility for speaking and listening. I was impressed when I read almost anything by Irving that the words had a life on the page. Close to the same feeling was another impression, of a living substantial figure whom the words defended, and who was capable of defending them. There were the words and there was the man; it mattered that both were there. Now we have the words, which persist, and the memory of the man. And how much it matters that we have both!

## Cornelius Castoriadis

I had corresponded with Irving Howe over the last fifteen years, concerning articles for *Dissent* and related matters, but we had never met. Then, in August and September of 1990, Octavio Paz and his friends at *Vuelta* organized an international symposium in Mexico City on the theme "The Twentieth Century: The Experience of Freedom," bringing together writers and intellectuals from Europe, East and West, and the Americas, to discuss the collapse of communist totalitarianism and the new political and ideological configuration. (The proceedings of the symposium have since been published in seven volumes by *Vuelta* under the title *La experiencia de la libertad, Mexico, 1991*. They include talks and commentary by Irving Howe.)

Irving and I fraternized immediately—both spontaneously, so to speak, and under the pressure of the "objective situation." Indeed, we were almost the only ones to stand up against the new converts to capitalist "liberalism" from the East, especially Russia. These people would not tolerate any criticism of the Western economic, political, and social regimes; they had seen the light of "free markets" and defended an unadulterated Thatcherist theology with the same dogmatism and crude demagoguery they had been using some months or years before to glorify the communist orthodoxy. I was very much impressed during these discussions by Irving's pugnacity, his intellectual rigor, and the wealth of his argumentation.

We promised to keep in touch and, two years later, I had the pleasure of meeting Irving and his wife in Paris. We found ourselves again in broad agreement concerning the main (gloomy) traits of the world situation. I remember expressing at some length my ideas about the deep ideological regression characteristic of the present climate everywhere, and Irving urging me to write a piece on this theme for *Dissent*, which, unfortunately, I have not yet found the time to do.

I will always regret that I only had the opportunity of meeting this exceptional man so late in his life, and in mine.



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Mitchell Cohen

Lucidity may have been Irving Howe's favorite word, as much in prose as in politics. In a preface to the republication of *Politics and the Novel,* written shortly before his death, he remarked that nowadays, "when critical writing is marked by obscurantism and jargon," he aspired to prose "so direct, so clear, so transparent that the act of reading comes to seem like looking through a glass."

Not that the world was so direct, so clear, so transparent. He knew too well its murkiness, but rebelled against internalizing it. He wasn't "post-modern." He scorned turbidity parading as profundity no less than false lucidity—the reduction of complications to simplistic schemes. But he believed that the effort had to be made, even if one failed, to see and think and write straight. And to be politically straight. He knew that nowadays all glasses have fissures. His own lucidity came, partly, of refusal—refusal to turn his eyes away, refusal to find refuge in obscurantism or jargon, refusal to conceal what ought not to be concealed or to hide or to fudge what had not been thought through.

He was, after all, a man whose youthful dreams of a better world were abducted when he was still young. He refused to rationalize this bitter fact, and, more painful, he insisted on learning from it. Moreover, he was never satisfied denouncing those who veiled their villainy behind left-wing language—though his wrath against them was furious, unflinching. Unlike many others, Irving Howe would not yield socialist ideals to their Stalinist kidnappers. Which is why, until the end of his days, he insisted that he be called a socialist; a qualitatively better America remained the regulative idea of his politics.

Writing of Ignazio Silone in *Politics and the Novel,* Irving provided his own self-portrait: "in some vague and indestructible way he remains a socialist, indifferent to party or dogma, yet utterly committed to the poor and the dispossessed"; in "his humorous irritability, his effort to speak without rhetoric or cant, [he became] a kind of moral hero for those of us who have been forced by history to put aside many of the dogmas of social radicalism but who remain faithful to the rebellious and fraternal impulse behind the dogmas." Irving Howe denied the Stalinist and neoconservative alike—and they were quite alike in this regard—any right to define what he called the image of his desire, socialism; it was an image of democratic, egalitarian humanism; it was a word embraced by the Debses, the Thomases, the Harringtons—those who, for him, were the best America has brought forth.

Irving Howe was, in one way or another, ever in search of America. Last year, while recovering from three operations, he wrote a preface to a new edition of *Winesburg, Ohio,* that remarkable portrait of small town America, of a limited world. Four decades earlier he had written a book about its author, Sherwood Anderson. And before that, as a soldier, on the eve of World War II, young Irving Howe, on his last weekend leave, made his way to Clyde, Ohio, were Anderson spent his youth and that was (partly) the model of Winesburg. The book had resonated in this Bronx-born son of Jewish immigrants. He later wrote: "A New York City boy who never saw the crops grow or spent time in the small towns that lay sprinkled across America, I found myself overwhelmed by the scenes of wasted life, wasted love—was this the 'real' America?" He recounted that nobody in Clyde wanted to speak of Winesburg to him. But in the ensuing decades Irving Howe continued to seek America—an America through which "democratic utopianism . . . runs like a bright thread," as he wrote in the last article he saw published in *Dissent.* In recent years, while so many Americans spoke of "limits," Irving Howe spoke, as he always had, of "possibilities."

Irving once wrote of a friend that he could think of no greater praise than a remark made of Thomas Hardy—that the world's slow stain had not rubbed off on him. How true this was of Irving. He was, indeed, steady—committed fiercely to certain basic values. As a maturing intellectual in the 1950s, he railed against an age of conformity, against intellectuals who made themselves comfortable in it. As an aging intellectual in the 1980s, he fumed about the sheer "meanness" of Ronald Reagan's world, and about the smug, "swaggering" acolytes who sought to give meanness an intellectual halo. Over and again, throughout the 1980s, I heard him use that word—"meanness," the "meanness" of it all. The theory of surplus value had long paled beside deeply human outrage: how can people treat people like that? No wonder that living his last years in what has been called Reaganism *bis*—the hollow estate of George Bush—Irving Howe was preoccupied with "the moral passion of the older Tolstoy."

Moral passion? What's the relation between moral passion and lucidity? Well, as Irving might say, a



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complicated one, of course. It has been debated by philosophers since philosophy began, and despite his insistence on lucidity, Irving had a mistrust of philosophical systems. There is a passage in Victor Serge's novel *The Case of Comrade Tulayev* that especially moved him. The penultimate line, he proposed in *Politics and the Novel,* was as good a prescription for a political novel as he could find. Ryzhik, an imprisoned Old Bolshevik who stubbornly retains his idealism and refuses to submit to Stalin, is being taken to Moscow. He meets a friend, another old oppositionist named Marenko, in a cell, and, after embracing, they enter into a discussion about the fate of socialism and themselves. Ryzhik speaks in political terms, but then Marenko says, "I am a Marxist too. But shut your eyes for a minute, listen to the earth, listen to your nerves."

No need to fathom the relation between lucidity and moral passion to grasp why their entwined presence in this passage so struck Irving Howe. He insisted on living through complications without imposing false syntheses. He remained, resolutely, a man of the left, all while castigating any authoritarian who spoke in the name of socialism; as an American, he criticized incisively this country's copious warts, all while refusing any form of anti-Americanism; as a literary critic, he was able to admire profoundly authors whose politics appalled him (and he loved and read and wrote of literature as literature, not as a means to parade theoretical pseudo-acumen); and as a Jew, he retained a deep bond to Jewry even though there was little left in American Jewish life that he found alluring (and he was supportive of the Jewish state all while he was critical of Israeli policies).

In the coming years, as we at *Dissent* continue to dissent, as we try to further some very human values in an America not so receptive to them, in a world still not so attractive, the spirit of Irving Howe, that very human exemplar of the politics of integrity, will, I hope, continue to grace our pages—perhaps whispering to us the words of Isaac Babel's "Gedali": "The International—we know what the International is. And I want an International of good people."

## Lewis Coser

Lionel Trilling once told how he had been looking for an appropriate word to characterize George Orwell, whom he wished to eulogize. It finally seemed to him that a very old-fashioned word was most appropriate, the word virtue. This word seems to me also most appropriate to characterize Irving Howe. He was a virtuous man, one who tried to live up to self-imposed moral standards and moral duties.

Take his heroic effort to transmit the heritage of Yiddish literature to a generation of both Jews and gentiles to whom it was, by and large, a dead tradition. Irving believed it was the duty of people like himself to serve as a transmitter between the world of Yiddish and the modern world. He was aware that Yiddish would soon become a dead language, yet he spent innumerable hours to help preserve its masterpieces in translation, even though he himself lived in a very different cultural universe and even though his devotion to Yiddish brought no material benefits. The adolescent Irving Howe read Milton and Wordsworth more assiduously than he read Yiddish writers, but the mature Irving Howe succeeded in making the American literary public aware of the greatness of Isaac Bashevis Singer and other Yiddish writers because he felt it to be a moral duty to help preserve Yiddish culture, at least in its literary manifestations. *World of Our Fathers* is likewise above all an evocation of a dying world by an author who does not inhabit that world but feels a duty to describe it so that it will not be obliterated by the march of time.

As an editor of *Dissent,* so it would appear to me, Irving Howe also felt the moral duty to evoke the spirit of socialism just because it was not fashionable and the thing to do in the miserable nearly half a century in which the magazine has been in existence. When Irving and I would talk about the chances of creating a magazine of the democratic socialist left during the McCarthy years, we both felt that its chances to live for more than a year or two were very slim. But Irving argued that it was worthwhile to devote a big chunk of his time to the magazine, much more than any other editor including myself, because the idea of socialism should remain an image of our desire even though the reality of socialism, in the East but also largely in the West, was not something that could inspire a new generation of intellectuals and activists. One had to try. And try he did for over forty years. One cannot calculate exactly how much time Irving spent on



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editing *Dissent* because in a sense he was preoccupied with *Dissent* almost all the time. When I would call him from Boston about some other matter he came back to *Dissent* almost instantly. In any case, I don't think it is exaggerating when I say that at least two days of the seven-day week *Dissent* engaged Irving's full attention for something like forty years. And all this without any material rewards whatsoever and an often exhausting schedule of teaching, writing, and addressing a variety of audiences, be it among Democratic Socialists of America or elsewhere. His commitment to the life of *Dissent* was indeed a virtuous undertaking.

George Orwell, Ignazio Silone, and a few contemporary and near-contemporary writers who stood very high in Irving Howe's pantheon won his admiration not solely because of their sheer literary merits but also, perhaps above all, because they provided guidelines of how to behave in a dismal world with virtuous commitment to moral standards.

Whenever my telephone has been ringing in the last few weeks I have imagined for a second that Irving was at the other end of the line to talk about the problems of the next issue. There will no longer be his voice on the line, yet there will remain our collective memory of what he did, how he behaved, and how he inspired all of us to emulate his moral standards. He will be thoroughly missed. There will be an empty chair where he once sat at our editorial meetings—but we shall continue, of that I am sure, to carry on in his spirit, and the idea of democratic socialism, as he argued, will continue to be the image of our desire.

## Ferenc Fehèr and Agnes Heller

Rarely, if ever, are the words "socialism" and "nobility" associated with one another. Early socialists, following in the tradition of the French revolution, sought to destroy the old regime and its inequality. In the twentieth century, neither of socialism's main branches had much time for "nobility." Social democrats became a part of mass society, emphasizing their "plebeian" mettle. Communists, while they erected concentration camps and fashioned ruinous economies, boasted that their new civilization had nothing to do with the "ridiculous ceremonies" of historically defunct classes and estates.

Irving Howe was an heir of America's democratic socialist tradition. He was a principled democrat in political vision as much as in life-style. Three years ago we spent a week with him in Mexico City, on the occasion of a series of televised debates on the liberation of Eastern Europe, and witnessed, not without amusement, his utter shock at the lavishness of the hospitality bestowed on the participants.

He once told us that 1940 had been the darkest year of his life. For a moment he believed that the Hitler-Stalin pact would hold and the world would plunge into a long nightmare of tyrannies. He was uncompromising in his criticism of Moscow's "socialism of the Gulag," even when many left-wing intellectuals made contemptible concessions to Stalin and his successors.

Howe remained an egalitarian opposed to all despotisms. Much could be said about him as eloquent militant of a deserving cause, but that would never reveal his unforgettable personal quality. The key was Irving Howe's nobility—a word he rarely used. He stood for a democratic mass society guided by socialist dynamics, but Irving Howe was not himself made of the stuff of mass society. The title he gave to his journal of democratic socialism, *Dissent,* shows what animated him, what deeply moved him. He dissented against McCarthyism, which enthralled so many in the 1950s, just as the neototalitarianism of "political correctness" does now, and, in the 1960s, he dissented against pathologies—particularly intolerance—in both the old and new lefts. Irving Howe disliked Georg Lukacs, who was, in his view, too patrician, too abstract, and too compromised. Yet he embodied a Lukacsian maxim: real courage is not displayed in standing up to the schoolmaster but in saying "no" to classmates who have transgressed one's deepest moral and political convictions. He was alien to any form of mob socialism. The recent memorial for him was heartwarming, for the huge gathering demonstrated that in the end he was not isolated. But standing alone, sticking to his guns, was never an "emergency situation" for Irving Howe. It was a way of life.

This New York social and cultural celebrity criticized those with whom he disagreed, but accepted disagreement as a fact of healthy culture; he drew lines, but was able to make friends across them. In his criticism he always considered the



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vulnerability of the criticized. His gestures of friendship were filled with a unique refinement; he lacked all the false grandeur of European mandarins. Lukacs sometimes said of those around him: *unus eademque nobilitas*—one and the same nobility. Irving Howe, democrat, democratic socialist, egalitarian, would never have used these words, but he personified them.

There is an element of inhumanity in drawing "sociological lessons" before a fresh grave. And yet we must do so, in Irving Howe's spirit. His life's lesson is that in our age of "mass democracy," nobility of life, of stature, of gestures and of words—all so badly needed though rarely attained—is a personal accomplishment, not that of a caste of notables and celebrities. Few, perhaps, will recognize this message. But as Irving Howe, utopian and incorrigible realist, would say: This is in the nature of things.

## Paula Fox

I have tried these last weeks at all hours of the day to evoke Irving's voice, its cadence, its fluency, and a freshness of tone that the years never made stale. There were moments when I would listen so closely to his voice that I would lose track of what he was saying.

A slow, steady accumulation of affection grew in me over the more than thirty years I knew him. I had barely realized, until Ilana Howe called with the news of his death, what it all added up to—that I loved him, that he is irreplaceable.

It is not only Irving whom we have each lost, but his particular way of seeing each of us. That is a second death.

When Irving talked about writing, and about the writers and poets whom he loved, it was with the ardor and innocence of a great reader. And in his face, when he spoke about them, I thought I could glimpse the youth he had been when he first began to feel the passion for literature.

When I sent him a manuscript or a published book, he always wrote me, sometimes a card, sometimes a letter. For he honored the effort a writer must make with every book. Those notes have sustained me over three decades. They, too, were fluent and held his unique freshness of view.

He was tough-minded, sometimes obdurate. He did not praise too quickly or too easily. But there was no meanness of spirit in him, no pettiness. And he did not have a touch of that raging self-importance and complacency that are, so often, afflictions of notability.

In truth, he was diffident; a modest man. In a review published shortly after his death, he asked, after suggesting a similarity between two Italian writers, "[A]m I just imagining this?" That was so characteristic of him—not to be tentative, but to be, where literature was concerned, open and self-questioning.

The private Irving often regarded the public Irving with a certain wryness, as though to say—what had all *that* to do with the hard work, the hard thinking, to which he devoted so much of his life's energy? He took an austere pride in his work, but I've known few people with so little vanity.

That unpretentiousness in him, along with his awareness of how he might be seen by others in the several worlds of his reputation, could take a comic form.

Many years ago, my son and Irving's stepson were in the fifth grade together. They were given one of those vaguely cosmic assignments with which teachers sometimes fob off their obligation to teach. The children were to write the entire history of Spain, or some other country, without recourse to any encyclopedia.

Irving and I were obliged to help the dismayed boys. We had frequent telephone conferences marked by exasperated laughter. How on earth were we to go about writing compositions that were supposed to be the work of ten-year olds?

But we did, somehow, and sent the children off with their reports that were mostly ours. A week or so later, I asked Irving: "What grade did you get?" He paused a moment, then replied, dryly, "B."

He liked personal stories if they were not too long or too lugubrious, and he took an intense delight in jokes. It was my delight to collect them for him. There were even times when I could get him to extend, by a few minutes, his famous, abruptly ended phone calls if I said I had remembered a joke. After I told it, there might be a wild burst of laughter.

On the day of his death, while I was at his apartment, I had to go out on an errand. The



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doorman, after a formal expression of regret, said suddenly, spontaneously, "I loved to make Professor Howe laugh."

So did I. Now that laughter is stilled. And I think of the Emperor Hadrian's words as he lay on his deathbed: "Little soul—where will you find a home—poor naked little soul, without your old power of joking."

## Emanuel Geltman

What shall I, can I, say about a close friendship and collaboration that lasted well over fifty years, even if my fellow editors allow me some extra space? (I hear Irving's voice in my ears, an injunction he ordered on just about everything we published: cut it!) This is not supposed to be about me but some—much—of myself has to enter—like a stab in the gut.

When did I first meet Irving? Probably in the famous City College alcove when, several years older, I went there to speak for a small Trotskyist, YPSL (Young Peoples Socialist League) club. Doubtless it was when the Trotskyists (having entered the Socialist party as part of what was called "The French Turn"—a subject I leave to historians) left the SP, along with the leadership of the YPSL. That would be about 1937, but the friendship did not take shape until the split in the Socialist Workers party where the "minority" of 40 percent—the so-called Shachtmanites—left to form the Workers party, later the Independent Socialist League. (Shachtman himself never claimed "ownership." At first, we—some of us anyway—might as well have been called Carterites, after Joe Carter—which is my backhanded way, of which I'm sure Irving would have approved, of introducing a much delayed "eulogy" for a dear friend and mentor about whom I never wrote a word because I didn't know he had died until years after the event. We had lost touch.)

In 1940, the WP launched its weekly, *Labor Action,* of which I was editor and Irving my associate. Were we paid? Yes, theoretically; somehow we managed, since enthusiasm goes a long way. When the party sent me to serve as "organizer" in California, Irving took on the editorship by himself. When he was drafted, I returned to New York and *Labor Action*—until I was drafted at which point Al Glotzer took over. When I came out of the army I resumed editing the paper for several years, while Irving wrote for it, and for the *New International* (the "theoretical" monthly).

Irving had spent the war years in Alaska, reading, preparing himself for the literary career for which he later became so well known, but always sharing his literary interests with his political interests and commitments. (Because his writing read so smoothly there were those who thought he could churn it out. Not so. I remember a time, I think he was writing his book on Faulkner, when he was laboring over the last chapter, and he complained—why am I writing this when I should be writing about politics? By the same token, when he wrote political books, he chided himself because he should be writing on literature.)

Irving worked for Dwight Macdonald on *Politics,* then for *Partisan Review,* and—well, it paid better—as a book critic for *Time*. More important, Irving began to write books, the first one I think on Sherwood Anderson, then *Politics and the Novel*—a truly independent exercise.

With Stanley Plastrik and some others we had begun to debate differences about the Marshall Plan and other issues, debates which, in the nature of the movement, were sharp. Irving and Stanley resigned in 1952 and I followed—with others—a few months later. The long association took a little longer to break, even if it was done in the most comradely way. What to do? No home.

Irving, Stanley, Jack Rader, and I would meet from time to time to examine our politics and where we belonged. Irving had begun to teach at Brandeis. While there, Lew Coser—who had written for *Labor Action*—proposed that we issue a magazine. We held meetings, invited others who might be interested. Finally, in 1953, we decided to go ahead with the unlikely project. Let it be said that while money and resources (writers, for example) were seen as a problem, we never gave the threat of McCarthy much thought. We had decided that if we could raise, say, a thousand dollars, enough for a year's publication, we could start. A letter over Meyer Schapiro's signature brought in small contributions, and names of other people to ask. Ever vigilant about money, Stanley promised contributors that the money would be held in escrow and returned if we did not publish. We reached a thousand, and a comrade who proved to be a very good friend added a thousand. (Since the money we collected was in



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escrow we reached into our own meager pockets for later mailings.) In January 1954 we published our first issue. It was immediately attacked, from the right (especially in a long review in *Commentary*) and from the left, and all of a sudden we had a reputation. And writers. Silone wrote, Harold Rosenberg wrote, Paul Goodman, Erich Fromm, Norman Mailer, and the greatest coup of all, "On Socialist Realism," by someone named Tertz, who, we later discovered, was the great Russian dissident, Sinyavsky. Add Henry Pachter, George Lichtheim, Ben Seligman—we had writers. And we had Irving, who wrote for almost every issue of the magazine until, until—it's hard to get it out—he died, having first faced the torment of three operations and a prolonged stay in the hospital. But he recovered, and began to write as well as ever. Until . . .

Operating on a shoestring, we all did double duty. Irving would come by my home in the Village, help dummy up the galley proofs—in the days of "hot metal" one did that. We would walk around, always stopping at the 8th St. Bookshop, and move *Dissent* to a prominent position, along with whatever book of Irving's had been published. Irving loved to walk and talk. And that we did. Our editors will surely be impatient. Manny, bring it to an end. What end? How? Had I gone first, Irving would surely have written something more graceful. So where do I go from here?

Well, there was a private funeral service before the big memorial service at the 92nd St. Y, for a few friends and family. No one could speak easily. There were pauses lasting five minutes, it seemed, between speakers. Irving's son, Nick, spoke to those present: You were the voices Irving heard most! A few looked at me. Of those present, he had heard my voice most often. So I rose and said something like: In the last year or so, when Irving—already ill—felt the intimations of mortality, he would worry about what would happen to *Dissent*. I replied frivolously: since I'm older, I'm likely to die first and all I ask is that you make a short speech. But, should you go first, I promise a short speech. And this is it. End.

And now I've written more than I wanted to, breaking a kind of promise. This much I know, *Dissent* will go on. We have new (and many "old") editors and it will continue to be an excellent periodical, even if it remains the cottage industry it always was. Most of all, I recall Irving's last article on the validity of a utopian vision. It reasserts his principal commitment (in an article written long ago with Coser) that democratic "socialism is the name of our desire." Finally, there is an end to weeping, but treasured memories remain.

## Robert Heilbroner

It is very difficult to write about someone much celebrated, much admired, much mourned. I will content myself with this small anecdote.

A good friend was visiting one day when the mail came, bringing a letter from Irving in which he praised in lovely words a book manuscript I had shown him. I passed the letter over to my friend. "My God!" he said. "From Irving Howe! You must be ecstatic."

"Oh, I don't know," I said. "When you get to be my age, you have read enough comments not to take them too seriously. The bad ones you shrug off, the good ones you apply a knowing discount to. Knowing Irving, I doubt if I'll read this letter more than two or three hundred times."

## Mitch Horowitz

I had been looking forward to hearing Irving Howe's speech all week. At last April's Socialist Scholar's Conference he was part of a closing panel; I knew his address would be short and probably without notes—but the chance to hear him speak was a small treasure.

He walked in looking very pale and, as it always seemed, dressed too warmly for such a sunny spring day. I knew that, like me, others present were wondering whether to say hello. There were times when approaching Irving felt a little like what Michael Harrington described when he wrote of his



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own awe around Willy Brandt: "It is hard to discuss the weather with someone who, morally and historically, is twenty feet tall."

One participant on the stage had recently written an unkind and inaccurate attack on Irving's politics. Irving shook the man's hand and assured the audience that the panelists would "more or less" be in agreement. For all his reputed "prickliness," who at such times could be more gracious? He went on to talk painfully of the corruption scandals shaking the European social democrats—couldn't we socialists expect at least a little more from them? And certainly it was *them*—the other guys—whom he meant. It's been since that speech and Irving's death that I've learned in my gut what I've always known in my head: that he was not a social democrat with a loyal penchant for socialist language. As true as Luxemburg, Kautsky, Bernstein, Debs, or Thomas, Irving was a socialist and an opponent—not a modifier—of a capitalist order he saw as marred by personal limits and social cruelty. He exhorted the crowd to keep alive the flames of a democratic utopianism, to exercise one's "moral imagination."

After Irving finished there were the usual embarrassing disruptions from sect members. Calmly—and with some humor—Irving responded to the tumult. He concluded the question period by wryly congratulating one yeller who insisted that he'd been investigated by the FBI and recommending that the man read Lenin's *Left-wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder*.

But, more important, he urged the listeners not to fall into the delusion that Western democracy was somehow a fraud. This was a man who had witnessed the resulting horrors when civil, electoral democracy was disrupted in the name of mobilizing "the people." In the name of causes supposedly greater than free speech, Irving had witnessed the flames.

Irving brought wisdom and complexity into a movement too often marred by dogma and sophistry. He reminded us again and again of the fruits of steady, clear thought and of a utopianism that understood the pains of history. And in just his very presence at such events, he taught us how to maintain our principles in a discouraging movement at a troubling time. Who will teach us these things now? Did we learn them well enough to survive and pass them on? Goodbye our teacher and comrade—I can only pray that we have.

## Nicholas Howe

My father moved in a world of stories. He told his own in *World of Our Fathers* and *A Margin of Hope;* he wrote about those of Faulkner and Hardy, Anderson and Wharton, Dreiser and Sholom Aleichem, Leskov and George Eliot, T.E. Lawrence and Pirandello, Delmore Schwartz and Raymond Carver, Tolstoy and Umberto Saba—the list amazes as much for its diversity as its length. With Ilana, he collected the shortest of stories and together they made an anthology—*Short Shorts*—unlike any ever done: one that could satisfy his belief that very few pieces would not be better if cut by 20 percent. With this love of stories, he welcomed my wife, Georgina, into the family, surprised but always delighted to have a novelist for a daughter-in-law.

His love of stories, his hope that he might make some sense of the world through them, gives me a way of talking about his complexity and yet also his simplicity as a man and writer. So let me tell you a story about him, a story that helps me understand the wholeness of his life's work. In the fall of 1986 he came to visit me in Oklahoma and we took a road trip to the Wichita Mountains, about two hours southwest of Norman, where I then lived. These mountains rise up from a prairie that matches the mind's-eye view of Oklahoma: flat, dry, windswept, treed with a scattering of cottonwood and blackjack oak. These mountains are part of a wildlife refuge that has, among other animals, a vast herd of buffalo; in an irony my father found delicious, these buffalo descend from a few that had been shipped out to Oklahoma in 1905 from the Bronx Zoo. As we sat in the November sun eating sandwiches and drinking coffee, my father talked of the landscape and the way its hard vastness evoked fundamental qualities of American life. If he seemed out of place there in his city clothes and his New York quickness, the place itself was not alien to him; it had for years been part of his imaginative landscape. After lunch, we drove deeper into the Wichitas and visited Holy City, a stage set made from native red granite where the locals put on a passion play each Easter. For the rest of the year, the Stations of the Cross stand gaunt and eerie against the blue Oklahoma sky. The story of the place tells of an emigré Austrian pastor who was sent out to tend the souls of Indians and who came to feel, in a moment of hallucinatory loneliness, that the landscape of the Wichitas bore an exact resemblance to that of Judea.



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Gazing at the scene, savoring its story, smiling at our being together there of all places in the world, my father turned to me and said with wonder: "It's straight out of Flannery O'Connor." I never felt closer to him than at that moment, for with that one sentence he gave me the story that would help me live in that alien landscape. It was his way of telling me he understood.

As we drove back to Norman that afternoon, we passed through a series of small towns that seemed to be losing their place in the landscape. My father asked the same question as we passed through each of them; it was the question he asked wherever he traveled: "How do people make a living here?" I tried to answer as best as I could: they worked in the feed mill or the grain elevator; they were roughnecks in the oil fields; they raised wheat or cattle. Some ran stores that served the outlying district. And many, I said, had no work. Oklahoma was then in a bust; the price of oil had dropped by more than 50 percent a few years before, and these towns were deep in depression. One glance down empty main streets told him as much; he had grown up in the East Bronx of the thirties and knew the smell of poverty wherever he encountered it. The story he wanted to hear was about those without work; he was haunted by it in Oklahoma or New York, Italy or Israel. He wanted always to know how people in a place managed to escape the humiliation of being without a job, of being without the simple but sustaining dignity that comes with work and the ability to provide food and shelter and perhaps a bit more to those we love.

And yes, there were writers who told this story, who knew it as well as he did. He wrote about them with a comrade's voice that you can hear most beautifully in the sentences about Ignazio Silone that run like a bright thread through many of his books. But I think that each of the many thousands of pages he wrote during his long life as a socialist—a life of writing that ran for more than fifty years and included not just the big books but also numberless op-ed pieces, reviews, bits for *Dissent*, forgotten dispatches from the front—that each of these pages drew on this same story. My father was a socialist—and make no mistake about his allegiance—because he understood the humiliation that comes to those without work, to those without the bare security of a decent living. He did not always write about these humiliations; he knew that pleasure mattered, and he found it most deeply in listening to music; he reserved as his favorite word of praise "delicious." But he also knew that his life was sustained, in a phrase he took from a Hasidic story, by the steady work of waiting. In the tale, of course, the watchman of Chelm waits for the Messiah and complains to the village elders that his pay is too low. To which they respond, "Yes, the pay is low. But consider, the work is steady." My father knew that any messiah who was likely to appear this late in the twentieth century would only betray those who followed him. He knew that he could only wait and write and hope for something much more modest—for a world more attractive.

The last words tonight should be my father's. Let me read to you the closing paragraph of an essay he wrote in 1955 about Walt Whitman, a poet he loved for his egalitarian sympathies and his New York stories.

> And a final unorthodox note: It is generally said that Whitman declined in poetic power after the Civil War. This is true in a way, the poems of the later years being obviously more fragmentary and short-breathed than those of the earlier ones. But among the later pieces there are some with the most subtle refinement and humor. In his very old age he wrote a twelve-line poem called *After the Supper and Talk* in which he describes his reluctance to leave—we need hardly be told what it is that he must leave:
>
> After the supper and talk—after the day is done,
> As a friend from friends his final withdrawal prolonging,
> Good-bye and Good-bye with emotional lips repeating,
> (So hard for his hand to release those hands—no more will they meet,
> No more for communion of sorrow and joy, of old and young,
> A far-stretching journey awaits him, to return no more.)
> Shunning, postponing severance—seeking to ward off the last word ever so little,
> E'en at the exit-door turning—charges superfluous calling back—e'en as he descends the steps,
> Something to eke out a minute additional—shadows of nightfall deepening,
> Farewells, messages lessening—dimmer the forthgoer's visage and form,
> Soon to be lost for aye in the darkness—loth, O so loth to depart!
> Garrulous to the very last.
>
> No praise is needed [my father ends], nor could any be sufficient for the frank pathos and relaxed gaiety of that final line. This is the way a man, and a poet, should end.



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## Nina Howe

I want to talk about the world of my father—the world that I knew best, that is Irving Howe as father and grandfather. I knew my father in many ways, but I will leave it to others to talk about him as a literary critic, as a man of politics and ideas. Rather, I want to talk about the personal side of my father, the less public part of his life.

One of my earliest and most vivid memories of my father took place on a sultry summer afternoon in the ruins of Ostia, the seaport of ancient Rome. I was about five years old and my brother, Nick, was about four. My mother was exploring the ruins and left the three of us behind under a tree. Nick and I had a wonderful time digging trenches in the dirt for our Dinky cars, while Daddy sat on a small ledge under the tree reading a book. I remember looking up and seeing him engrossed in his book. He was so much at peace as he read on this still, hot afternoon. It was one of my first memories of my father, and the book is a central theme in my image of him. I don't know what book he was reading, and when I asked him several years ago, he no longer remembered. From this experience, I gained an appreciation that books had some kind of magical quality, that in some way they were a special gift. This is a very special gift I feel he gave to me and I know to many others as well.

A second vivid memory comes from my adolescence—I was perhaps fifteen. Nick and I were visiting Daddy on Cape Cod, and the family was sitting around the table talking on a warm summer day. Suddenly, a comment someone made excited Daddy and he went in search of a macabre story, "Oil of Dog," by the nineteenth-century author Ambrose Bierce. Daddy's reading was spellbinding, his voice clear, loud, rich in expressive detail. Even now, I can hear it echoing in my head. At the end of the story, Daddy laughed with a great sense of glee at this bizarre tale. This incident stands out in my mind for several reasons. Certainly, the entertainment value of listening to a well-read story was important. However, it also signified that reading was not just a solitary activity, but could be a focus for interpersonal exchanges, that is, a time for sharing of feelings and an exploration of the world of ideas.

A third set of memories revolves around an activity that Nick and I called "raiding the closet." In Daddy's apartment there was a storage closet off the kitchen that held the usual assortment of items as well as extra copies of his books. He faithfully sent Nick and me copies of most, but not all, of his new books. Partly out of modesty and partly because he probably thought of these books as mere footnotes to his life's work, some stayed in the closet; generally these were foreign editions of his books or novels for which he had written an introduction. What Daddy did not count on was the overwhelming pride of his children—we felt it was important to have everything that he wrote, so we "raided the closet." I hope that he knew the depth of our admiration and pride in his work. "Raiding the closet" was our secret, and we felt a genuine sorrow when the closet was torn down several years ago to enlarge the dining room.

My father conveyed to me a deep love of literature and, over the years, he guided my reading, by suggesting specific books, or I would ask for a reading list. After my husband, Bill, and I returned from Russia and Estonia in 1989, I was eager to attack Russian literature. Bill and I wish that we had taped the impromptu lecture on Russian literature that Dad gave us when I requested a reading list. He spoke in an organized and chronological way, making the links between the books and authors clear as he explained the major themes and images of Russian literature. Daddy's list included classic authors such as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky and other less familiar names, such as Lermontov and Zamyatin. In the following years, he would ask about my progress and seemed to take great satisfaction in my reading. But it was his appreciation of Russian literature that he conveyed in his impromptu lecture that stands out in my memory.

His own collection of books was fascinating, and when visiting I would investigate his bookshelves and the stack next to his desk. The stack consisted of books that he was using in his current writing or that he had been sent for various reasons. After his death, I found myself automatically checking out the stack—there were novels by Dostoevsky, Brian Morton, E.L. Doctorow, a book on the history of Yiddish theater, Paul Berman's book on political correctness, and, finally, several books on socialism, including Michael Harrington's. He was a man of many worlds, and I marvel at how this was reflected in his day-to-day reading.

Many other memories of my father center on books or his work. I remember him with fingers flying at the typewriter in several houses and over



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many years. He was a disciplined, efficient writer, a man dedicated to his work; he also took great pride in the fact that Nick and I were dedicated to our chosen fields. From his dedication, I realized how much he loved the worlds of politics, literature, and culture. In later years, we shared a love of the ballet. My love started with childhood ballet lessons. Although I wish I had inspired him, he seems to have developed an appreciation of this art form on his own. Dad was a great source of information about Balanchine ballets, and part of our last phone conversation was about a Balanchine ballet to be performed by the Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, which Bill and I had planned to see.

But there was so much more to my relationship with my father than books and work. When I became an adult, we developed an increasingly close, warm, and affectionate relationship. In times of personal crisis, Daddy was always supportive and asked the right questions; he may not have asked many questions, but they got to the heart of the matter. Five years ago when I became ill with cancer, Daddy was right there. He insisted on accompanying me on my first visit to see the surgeon, Dr. Seymour, at the Montreal General Hospital. Beforehand, he gave me lecture about asking *all* the questions and getting *all* the pertinent information, a practice he didn't always apply to his own health problems. We were both terrified, but Dr. Seymour's kind, professional manner calmed us both, and Daddy felt that I was receiving the best of care, then and in subsequent years. Moreover, Daddy was amazed that I was being treated under Canada's universal health care plan at no cost. Daddy was there for both operations and I dimly remember him holding my hand as I came out of the anesthesia and helping me as I vomited. He always remembered when it was time for my semiannual checkup. I was about to call him with the good news about the latest one when Nick called to say that he had been stricken. I know how pleased he would have been.

There were many fun times. He said that I was the perfect audience because I'd laugh at all of his jokes, good and bad. In recent years, one memorable afternoon stands out from many. He was visiting us in Montreal early in the baseball season. The Mets were playing the Expos, so Bill, Daddy, and I trundled out to Olympic Stadium to see the game. After a couple of boring innings, we began talking about the clichés that sportscasters use when broadcasting baseball games. For the rest of the game, and even on the subway ride home, a steady stream of clichés poured out of Daddy and Bill and we laughed until our sides ached. He took delight in such profundities as "A win in April is as good as a win in September," or "Then again, the only thing that matters is the numbers on the scoreboard at the end of the game," and "That new fellow is a rookie, but he's got a lot of savvy." We worried that we might be trapped in the cliché mode forever; it was an amazing fantasy and one of the happiest afternoons of my life!

Finally, let me say a few words about my father as grandfather. About ten or eleven years ago, Daddy was speaking at the University of Toronto and staying at the Park Plaza Hotel, a grand old hotel and a place that he loved. One evening, as he was stretched out on the bed with his shoes off, he announced that he was ready to be a grandfather! I was pleased, but taken aback, because there was no man in my life. He agreed that this was a bit of a problem, but. . . . Needless to say, his pleasure in his grandchildren was profound. Daddy came to see his granddaughter, Anna, when she was two days old. I shall never forget him sitting with tiny Anna on a pillow on his lap, cooing to her and watching her over a long and hot June afternoon. As Anna grew, she really caught her grandfather's imagination. Last fall, Daddy came to visit us when Anna was about sixteen months old. At that point, she loved saying "Uh-oh," whenever she dropped something or just for the sheer pleasure of talking. Daddy was absolutely captivated. For months afterwards, I would pick up the phone and the first thing I would hear would be "Uh-oh." When saying goodbye, Daddy would say, "Tell Anna, Uh-oh!" It has become a part of the family language.

During our last visit together in March, Daddy came to meet his new grandson, Nicholas; he was thrilled to have two grandchildren. One afternoon, we were sitting in the kitchen having a cup of tea and a cookie. Nicky was on the table in his infant seat and Anna was playing on the floor. At one point, Anna walked by, reached out, patted Daddy on the back and said, "Grandpa, Grandpa." Daddy just glowed and gave her an affectionate pat on the head. A small moment, but one that I shall never forget.

There are many other fond moments and stories, but I feel that they are moments and stories for my children. The world of my father was very special to me, and I am very sad that Anna and Nicky will only hear about it secondhand. My job ahead is to convey this world to Anna and Nicky, a task both easy and impossible.



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## Alfred Kazin

I had a lecture to give one night at Brandeis when Irving was teaching there. The lecture must have been long and the questions and the reception after the questions even longer. By the time all this was over and Irving was waiting to show me my room for the night, there were hardly any lights on the campus. We had to grope our way in near darkness. I was walking slightly ahead of Irving, didn't see the slight parapet right ahead of me, and fell right over it. Irving didn't see it either, and he too fell over it. He got up very disgruntled. "God damn it, Alfred," he muttered, "why must we always have the same experiences?!"

This was a line all too familiar to me, one I had long detested in the mouths of other people, and now that the man himself had said it, I happily retorted—"Irving, I assure you, we don't!" But of course we did have similar "experiences," while never really approving of each other's temperament and ideas. And that was certainly one big reason for our uneasy relationship. Ignorantly and (I thought) snobbishly, people tended to link us together.

Only five years apart in age, here were two Jewish literary critics with the obviously strong interests in the social implications of literature that Jewish intellectuals tend to have. Both from immigrant Yiddish-speaking homes, both from City College, both began as free-lance critics in the depression and became university professors without the Ph.D. They were in their youth too poor, perhaps too *engagé*, even too busy writing for a living, to worry about "higher degrees."

It was not lost on me that all too often we were being put together simply because we were Jews. Jews might perforce be accepted in science, medicine, law, even in Congress, but surely they were not seasoned enough in the English language and its literature to be taken seriously as judges of fine effects, of creative subtlety. Of course Irving and I were essentially autodidacts, even the first English speakers in our families. But while autodidacts like us often made influential historians, political analysts, philosophers, and wisdom figures on the stock market, the heavily traditionalist New Critics, especially those at Yale, found us unacceptable by the lights of their tradition. Even a *Wunderkind* like Harold Bloom, a Yale Ph.D. and no Jewish radical he, even if he came from a working-class home in the Bronx, infuriated the high priests at Yale to the point where one professor's wife told me that her husband was in church, on his knees, "praying for the death of Harold Bloom."

Alas, our common circumstances were never enough to bind Irving and me. I was once shanghaied into an acrimonious discussion with him on American writing at some terrible hall off 14th Street when Irving was still a Trotskyist. Although some of my best friends *had* been admirers of the late Lev Davidovich Bronstein (as he was born), I never understood the cult and liked to remember the Russian Jew who lamented, "The Trotskys make the Revolution and the Bronsteins pay for it."

My politics, such as they were, never impressed even me. I was not an activist, was indeed a good deal of a moralist. When Irving finally shook off Trotsky and became a leader of "democratic socialism" in America, I admired him and was grateful to him for standing up to all our many enemies on the left and the right. But having grown up in the old American socialist movement without much faith in it, I could no longer see anything in socialism. It meant nothing to me as a possible political force. I saw it, as I did certain religious groups and personalities, as a last desperate appeal for human cooperation in this most individualistic, most heedlessly competitive of capitalist societies, where failure was a norm less accountable than success. This supposedly "most religious nation in history" was also the most violent; this "greatest of opportunities was the worst of influences."

Socialism as a political movement had long outlived its insurgency, even its routine analysis of capitalism in a country where the working class and "minorities" were sunk in the same degraded television culture, the same crass interests and ambitions as everyone else. I was not only not a socialist, I didn't even believe in Irving's socialism except as moral energy and fearless criticism of the extremes in politics and academia. But that was enough for me. Irving and I were finally in the same humanist camp, with the same heroes and enemies. What I admired was Irving the reader, his heroes Silone, Orwell, Camus, Dickens—Irving the teacher faithful to the much-derided canon—Irving the Jew bringing Yiddish literature back and not only into Jewish lives—Irving faithful to the political hopes of his youth at a time when the familiar political fanaticism of Jewish intellectuals as a class was now



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spending itself on Reagan and Bush, on extreme nationalism in America and Israel, on a lust for power in Washington, Wall Street, Hollywood, the leading universities and scientific institutes.

The worse things got, the lonelier I felt in a world where the progress of Irving Kristol from the Trotskyist alcoves at City College to the boards of leading American corporations marked the cynical possibilities of ex-Marxist opportunism. But I now looked to Irving Howe to uphold a fundamental standard of decency. The more the baby PC critics—academic and conformist in every way, the only record of their scholarship usually the Ph.D.—showed their contempt for learning as they bullied their agenda on helpless minorities (not students for them but disciples), the more I looked to Irving to remind a negligent administration of a teacher's duty to stimulate the mind, not to flatter the helpless. And it took an audodidact to do that.

No wonder Irving became such a stirring symbol, and as the stirring turnout at the 92nd Street Y showed on May 24, an American leader. I miss his presence, his integrity, his stubbornness, his *plainness*. It is bitterly hard to think of the American scene, of American thought, without him.

## George Konrád

If I were to meet with Irving Howe today, in a New York coffee shop, or at Drenka Willen's* lovely dinner table, or in our kitchen here in Budapest, where my wife and I would invite a few friends to meet Irving and Ilana, we would most certainly be interrogated. An intelligent, painstaking curiosity would like to know what is happening here, how we are faring, and just what sort of people are we, anyway? And it wouldn't be simply the curiosity of a colleague or that of a critic, a friend of foreign dissidents. Irving was a little like the uncle we all seem to need, the uncle we can confide in, whose approval we crave; who can be skeptical and judgmental, not just supportive, even when we are among family. What Howe said had a ring of authority. He was one of the leaders, an elder, a paterfamilias, who had to remain true to himself and produce a life that was a coherent whole.

He was one of the great intellectuals, an authentic dissenter, the odd man out in any cozy establishment. I can see him at a New York get-together, standing by the wall, preferably in a corner; people approach him, he is very good at shaking hands and saying something brief, or something a little meatier, depending on his interest in the individual. He knows how to receive and release people at this party, which he knew he was going to attend, though he wasn't entirely convinced he should.

It happens that we cannot stay in a place even when we think we probably ought to, and for him this included Israel, which always had a claim on his attention, but his true home was of course New York. He was an American, an American Jew; he didn't feel a need to be surrounded by that many more Jews; it pleased him that the parade of faces passing in front of a New York café represented the world.

Paradoxes amused him, he felt they made the picture whole and real. I once asked him if he thought there was a type of Jewish literature, written not by Israelis, in Hebrew or in Yiddish, not avowedly Jewish, which nevertheless was Jewish, if only because its world implied paradox. He reflected for a moment and answered with a question: "You mean a type of chicken soup with no meat or soup greens or noodles?" He was pleased with his rejoinder, as well he should have been, but a few minutes later—we had just left Drenka's house and were ambling down Houston Street—he struck down the winning metaphor: "Ah, but there is clear consommé." So the possibility does exist. He returned to the subject in Budapest, in a series of lectures he gave at several Hungarian universities. American Jewish literature, he said, is being absorbed into the mainstream as American Jews themselves, the younger generation, are becoming culturally more and more like other middle-class Americans.

The name hardly matters. It seems I had known Irving Howe long before I met him. I encountered smiles like his, in my father's small-town hardware store in prewar Hungary, on the faces of worldly-wise provincial types who came in to warm their hands over the potbellied stove. Whenever these merchants and tradesmen, friends of my father, spoke to me, I answered them as best I could, and even tried to make them smile. Irving could have

* Irving Howe's editor for many of his books.—Eds.



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stood there, too, amid the pots and pans, rubbing his hands, staring at the fire, managing a smile. Though the day was not much different from other days; there was more bad news than good, and even good news had a way of turning bad. There was little that could still surprise these respectable-looking older men; you couldn't really separate their smile from their resigned frown. It's true, though—and here I have to make a distinction between Irving and the men who stood around that potbellied stove—that the year 1944 came as a surprise even to them, so much so, that in 1945 they did not come back to warm their hands.

In my mind Irving Howe remains a reliable witness, a friend from a different world, an empathetic dissenter, the founding father of a culture of dissent, who dared, and knew how, to distinguish between good and evil. His death cannot prevent us from resuming our animated conversation, in a New York coffee shop, at Drenka Willen's lovely dinner table, here in our kitchen, or perhaps outside in the garden. Two curious people have become fond of each other. The younger one brings him up to date on the latest, things we already know, only too well.

TRANSLATED FROM THE HUNGARIAN
BY IVAN SANDERS

## William Kornblum

If you become a teacher you will yearn for a teacher of your own. Long before death stole Irving from us this irony of academia hit me when, through his open classroom door, I caught snatches of Professor Howe's brilliant lectures on Dickens or Twain. Irving's occasional public lectures also left me with a craving for more of his tough-minded insights on politics and the arts. Why then, over coffee in the cafeteria of the City University Graduate Center, would he persist in asking me for my opinions? Did he not know that what I most wanted were more of his ideas and his opinions? And often his most precious lessons came indirectly, from the books by others whom he most deeply admired.

The last of the many authors Irving commended to us was Primo Levi. Even more than Silone or Orwell, this gentle Italian Jew, an unusual master of science and letters, will always evoke memories of what Irving Howe brought to us as a teacher. Levi's lessons from Auschwitz encompass a vast theater of human failure, folly, cruelty, and heroism. Levi never avoids the uncomfortable issues of how, for better or worse, the victims themselves dealt with the calamity. Neither did Irving ever fail to raise the difficult issues. How often he was there to remind us, for example, that parties of the left, even when armed with a few paltry truths, are also capable of immense folly and evil.

Irving's hopeful pessimism recalls the spirit of Amos, the first of the literary prophets, who railed against his people's transgressions but believed in his heart that somehow, improbably, they would mend their ways. Like Irving Howe, Amos of the Old Testament was a universalist. Amos hears the Lord ask, "Are ye not as the children of the Ethiopians unto Me, O Children of Israel?" No people, neither Ethiopians, nor Israelites, nor any other, were exempt from Irving's wry judgments. His just criticism was not reserved for our ideological foes of the moment but could easily fall with tender weight on us, his friends and students, which is what made him a prophetic leader and a teacher truly worthy of the term.

## Robert Kuttner

Sudden deaths of friends still leading vital lives are always shocking. I suspect we were especially shocked by Irving's death because we assumed, despite his deteriorating physical health, that he would somehow live forever. Irving was such a towering figure that we understood him as a kind of monument.

He was a monument to a range and a depth almost impossible to imagine in one human being, combined with a quiet decency. Particularly for those of us who came of age during the relative calm of postwar America, Irving's several worlds seem of another era. He was of a generation that had life experiences that simply can never be lived again.



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The subculture has largely vanished that could produce a single man who could play so many roles, with each enriching the other and no sense of the dilettante. Those too young to have known Irving Howe except through his writings will find it hard to believe that a man of so many parts could have existed. And they will be impoverished for not having known him.

There was much about Irving that was old-fashioned, in the best sense. He was a man of books and of journals, not of "media." He was not a composite of research assistants and public relations packagers but of his own far-flung endeavor. He was astonishingly well educated. Yet his prodigious gifts came wrapped in a package with a nice, unpretentious human being. I often found it hard to believe that the quiet man at the end of the phone gently asking me to do another piece was the same giant whose books I had been reading since my undergraduate days.

In an age of superficial jingoism, he was a patriot. He knew the real America, of Emerson, of Faulkner, of the immigrant experience, far better than the cheap patriots who tried to appropriate what America stood for. He lived simply, and though he was perhaps the quintessential New York Intellectual, he was the antithesis of the celebrity intellectual. Lunch with Irving was never at cafes favored by literati, much less at palaces of high cuisine. He was uncorruptible by fashion, or anything else. Irving never sought what was trendy but followed his formidable intellectual curiosity and his reliable intuition.

Most important to the *Dissent* audience, Irving was an exemplary man of the democratic left. His values expressed a socialist republic of which one would actually want to be a citizen. If the democratic socialism that Irving imagined cannot be attained in our lifetimes, or in this life, perhaps the problem is not Oscar Wilde's claim that socialism would require too many evenings but rather that it would require too many virtues. Too few citizens possess the towering civic and humanistic virtues that Irving lived.

Irving died at a historic moment when a rather weak form of liberalism was reviving on the ashes of a failed conservatism, and the fall of communism was being scored, erroneously, as a simple victory of laissez-faire. Irving knew better. He appreciated, above all, human complexity.

He had little patience for cant or ignorant indignation, whether of the left, center, or right. He was a champion of public and private civility. His was a left of thoughtful idealism and search for insight, never of diatribe. His magazine is perfectly titled to reflect those values. Dissent, to Irving, meant not just dissent from establishment fashions but respectful and clarifying disputation among his own peers. Yet he managed to avoid the sectarian quarrels that represent the left at its worst.

Little magazines are special because they are communities of the intellect. To be an editor of such a magazine requires a rare blend of range, confidence, and humility. To curl up with manuscripts that need an editor's touch is either an act of immense ego or of great generosity. In Irving's case it was entirely the latter. Unlike bad editors, Irving never competed with his writers or tried to impose his views on theirs. He was too intellectually generous, too curious about what he could learn from other minds, and too secure in his own moorings. An editor like Irving helps writers to realize what they know but haven't quite grasped. He nurtures, inspires, befriends, notices connections, but never homogenizes. In the process he helps create a coherent larger literary and political whole out of disparate parts. That is why a large man sometimes dwells in a small magazine.

To know Irving and to appreciate something of his several worlds was to know that one could stretch one's own limits, yet to be entirely in awe of what he had achieved. As a progressive editor and writer a generation younger than Irving, I have long looked to him for inspiration. But now that he is gone, I find it utterly daunting to imagine myself or any of my contemporaries filling his extraordinary shoes.

## Jeremy Larner

In my freshman year, when this green kid from the Midwest met Irving Howe, I told him I had read *Fathers and Sons* that summer and could not understand how anyone could compare Turgenev to Dostoevsky.

"You will," he replied. At the moment, my feelings were hurt. Students were too quick to take his ironic dismissals for mere snobbery. It took a few years to realize he was also paying a compliment. In New York in the sixties, when I saw the relish with



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which Irving led *Dissent* meetings, I noticed how often he managed to slight a friend without knowing it. His gift for quick categories did not always work as well with people as it did with ideas. In compensation, he presented a large target.

Irving at the time was thirty-four, writing busily and feeling his oats—though at seventeen, I thought him sadly limited by middle age. Brandeis—six years old in 1954, with perhaps a thousand students—was prematurely New Leftish in the intensity with which we watched our teachers to see if their manners and mannerisms matched their ideals. Some of us judged Irving harshly for his sharp Ivy League clothes and mocked his habit of fondly curling and re-curling a forelock of hair with his index finger. He had little time for fools and delighted in drawing some piece of cant from a too-assured pupil. But his use of the Socratic method always led back to the books themselves and the problems they posed. He didn't linger to smooth hurts, but unlike a few others, he was too high-spirited to teach by humiliation.

At the first meeting of the first class I took with him, the English Novel, Irving drew the only diagram I ever saw him draw—two concentric circles, with the outer one fuzzy and irregular. He told us how every novel could be looked at as the overlapping of two attempts at order. The inner circle represented coherence, all the ways in which a book fulfilled the demands of its own shape and style. The outer circle stood for correspondence, the hard-to-define relation of the world of the book to the ever-larger, never-wholly-graspable universe of human experience. I still find this model useful in making distinctions about what a given book is and does. Irving demonstrated line by line, if need be, that a writer's politics, however important to understand, could not finally dictate the worth or power of his story.

With each eighteenth-century novel, Irving showed us what it was to be a reader, putting his own imagination at the disposal of the writer's world, engaging the book as he engaged his own reactions: finally, to gain the most palpable pleasure, as physical and playful as the absent-minded curling of a lock of hair.

There was an air of unreality about Brandeis in the fifties, where several hundred offbeat students (giddily but uneasily alienated, never imaging that blue jeans and pop rebellion would soon be merchandized) gathered with a group of brilliant maverick teachers to discuss every international crisis. I remember when the Russian tanks rolled into Hungary in 1956, a spontaneous free-form discussion lasted most of the night. Herbert Marcuse explained that we would have to wait to analyze what was happening; the rebels might be right-wingers or anti-Semites. Irving and Lew Coser stood up to say that people were dying in the streets for their freedom—they needed brotherly support, not scholarly judgment! Some students got the point; others felt that verbal "bad manners" were a sign of bad politics.

Shortly thereafter, I found myself moderating a student-sponsored discussion on politics and the novel, sitting between Irving and a guest speaker, Howard Fast. Fast, belying his name, rambled on about something he called "scientific socialism." Professor Howe couldn't sit still, and passed me a note asking how long I was going to let this go on. I'd fallen into a semi-doze when a bellow woke me with a jolt. "You have blood on your hands!" Irving cried, rising to shoot quick, sharp factual arrows into Fast concerning American writers who turned history to the party line. The audience then exploded into diatribes, interrupted now and then by a tearful appeal for love and peace. Fast professed himself scandalized, said he'd never before heard such invective.

Once again the manners issue arose, and one of Irving's staunchest defenders was Milton Sachs, a political scientist who ten years later appeared on television with maps and charts to justify Lyndon Johnson's escalations in Vietnam. From Sachs, we heard how Irving was among the Trotskyist students who were physically assaulted by Stalinists every time they tried to speak on the City College campus. Sachs did admit that Irving had a zest for polemics, earning him the college nickname, "Fang." But above all, Sachs challenged us, if murder and terror in the name of leftism weren't worth strong feelings, what was? We called Irving cold when he dismissed us; how could we now condemn his heat? Could it be he had a more developed sense of what really finally mattered?

A few months later, I wondered if Fast, too, had been more shaken by Irving than he would admit—when he announced, in the *New York Times*, that suddenly the show trials and the Hitler-Stalin Pact had become too much for him, and he sadly left the one and only party.

We were more comfortable with Irving as an uncompromising critic of liberals. Bohemian radical students were more than happy to embarrass the stream of celebrated visitors fawningly presented by Professor Max Lerner as examples of American success, especially Democratic politicians compromised by McCarthyism, and solemn journalists who



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had given names to the Un-American Activities Committee. Those who remember Adlai Stevenson as a voice of humane intelligence will be surprised by the acid tone with which Irving referred to him in, say, the *Partisan Review*—where he also published his classic essay on "This Age of Conformity," describing a society in which there was no room for dissent, for serious culture, or for recognition of human inequality and oppression.

I think as he grew older, the same imaginative sympathies that moved Irving to an appreciation of writers whose views of society and styles of expression were so different from his—novelists like Faulkner, Conrad, James, and Dostoevsky—moved him also in the area of politics to temper his scorn wherever he could find expressions of tolerance and generosity. In politics as well as literature, it was narrowness and meanness that offended him—and before the fifties were over, he made it clear that, for him, there could be no socialism without liberalism.

The source of Irving's coming mellowing could certainly be seen in his years at Brandeis. I remember a public seminar of the English department that opened with a reading of Joyce's three-page story "Araby." There was a brief pause as Joyce's magic settled. Then an hour's fierce argument burst out among some of the most compelling critics of their time, Irving and J.V. Cunningham and Philip Rahv, as they disputed the nature of Joyce's genius, of realistic fiction, of Irish history and the decline of the West. Their opinions were passionate, yet not meant to offend—and they duly conceded, as they went along, the points on which their opponents were better informed. The students lucky enough to be in that room learned that disagreement can be a way of taking people seriously, and that all tastes imply social and historical assumptions.

These kinds of lessons prepared me poorly for a world in which my training at disagreement was taken as, yes, "bad manners." I wrote Irving from UC Berkeley to tell him I was dropping my graduate fellowship to come to New York and take life on as a writer. Though he himself had no advanced degrees, Irving wrote back in alarm, worried I could not possibly make a living. As my self-described "Uncle," he began our long-running series of long-distance calls, clipping short each conversation at exactly three minutes.

The Mr. Howe I knew at Brandeis and the Irving I knew in New York through years when we each went through our personal troubles was not the Saint Irving I read about in a number of quasi-religious eulogies. He remained too quick to dismiss what he could not quickly define, and one wanted, at times, to kill him, if only to get his attention. But it's hard to think of anyone over the years who better repaid attention, or anyone who could read and write and think and talk so much with so much delight.

## Steven Lukes

Once I had met Irving, I never visited New York without calling on him. Unfortunately, I respected him to excess. Foolishly, I never stayed very long, not wanting to tie up his valuable time. I now nurse the futile belief that, had I been bolder, we would have become real friends.

Not that he ever in the least encouraged my reluctance to disturb him. He had the gift of welcome. He was always immediately warmly engaged and full of questions, as though gaps of months or years did not exist. I invariably felt that we were instantly on the same wavelength across the many topics on which we touched, from gossip about mutual friends (which I am glad to say he much enjoyed) to the latest turn in international politics. I would seek and follow his advice about what was best among what had lately been published. He would never fail to urge me to write for *Dissent*. We also shared the same impatience with the latest fashionable absurdities. I recall, on my last visit, his scorn for what we both agreed to be a (here nameless) instance of postmodernist charlatanism.

But it was in the domain of political sympathies that I found his attitudes and his biography most congenial and most reassuring. For his lifelong critical loyalty to the left is an object lesson in what living by principles means. He always resisted the ex-Marxist anticommunist rightward trajectory of so many of his generation and milieu, and retained, as an individual and editor, an admirable sense of proportion that was always rooted in radical and socialist traditions, movements, and writers.

One essential aspect of this sense of proportion was his sense of humor. There was a twinkle to his wisdom, which, I was glad to see, survived his



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painful health problems. On the miserable topic of overcoming illness, about which we shared our experiences, I found him as humorously insightful as ever.

Sadly, a letter arrived at my home in Italy the day after I read his obituary in the *Herald Tribune,* in which he took up a suggestion I had often made that he visit us in Tuscany. That, I am convinced, would have been the occasion when our friendship would have become real.

## Nicolaus Mills

When I think of Irving, I think of a Mets game we decided to go to on the spur of the moment one Sunday. It was a hot July day, Doc Gooden was pitching, and fifty thousand other New York fans had the same idea of where they wanted to be that afternoon. The only seats we could get an hour before the game were out in left field.

On a day in which Gooden was being pounded by the Atlanta Braves, our bad seats turned out to be a blessing. We got to see more action than the fans in field boxes. Our row was filled with a crew of construction workers from Long Island, and as the Mets fell further and further behind, they began drinking more and more beer.

By the seventh inning they were drunk. Friendly, full of life, they began striking up conversations about everything from the watered-down Shea Stadium beer to what was wrong with Gooden's fastball. After the Mets' Mookie Wilson turned in a spectacular one-handed catch on what seemed like a sure hit, one of the men sitting next to Irving nudged him in the ribs and said, "Best center fielder in the game."

Irving nodded, then softly replied, "But you should have seen Joe DiMaggio."

The man was stunned, the way I had once been stunned when Irving told me the first game his father took him to was one in which Babe Ruth hit a home run. From the look on the man's face, it was clear that he wanted to hear more about DiMaggio, and so Irving began talking about him—how he always seemed to anticipate where a fly ball was going, how he would cover long distances in Yankee Stadium without appearing to be running hard.

It did not occur to Irving that he was giving a history lesson or talking about the transforming qualities of grace. Nor did he seem to care that his listener was slightly drunk and never would be an Irving Howe reader. Irving didn't see teaching as something you did only in a lecture hall or between the covers of a book. It was an ongoing enterprise for him, as natural as breathing. You taught where you found shared interest and anyone willing to speak his mind.

When I think of all the obituaries on Irving that want to sanitize him—want to discuss his critical brilliance but downplay his socialism and his partisan battles—I wish for a moment the writers of those obituaries had been sitting in the row behind us that hot July day. Then I stop wishing. Those who want to believe Irving's life began and ended with the printed page wouldn't have taken much interest in that seventh-inning conversation.

They would have thought Irving was just shooting the breeze, being nice to a friendly drunk. They would have missed the pleasure he took in talking about Joe DiMaggio, and they would have failed to understand that as far as Irving was concerned, genius—whether that of Joe DiMaggio or George Balanchine or Ignazio Silone—was never limited by time or place.

## Jo-Ann Mort

I cherished Irving as a generous friend and mentor. We shared a passion for literature, democratic socialism, and Jewish identity, making him irreplaceable in my life. (The one thing he didn't share, or even comprehend, was my interest in tennis.) I will treasure the personal anecdotes, even as I am forever thankful for his writings and his example as a public and political figure of profound integrity.

I remember a meeting with Irving in 1981, when I returned from my first trip to Israel, consumed by guilt for not making aliyah and yearning for a Jewish American identity that would embrace something



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other than religion. I asked Irving, "How will I *be* Jewish in this country? Unsatisfied with religious observance, what will I *do* to express my Jewishness?" He told me I needn't worry. My Jewishness would be what it had been for Jews for thousands of years—"a sense of homelessness, wandering, a sort of uncomfortable unsettledness in the diaspora," he said, almost convincing me.

Irving, devoted to a democratic Israel, was an active supporter of Peace Now, believing a just peace between Israel and the Palestinians of such overriding importance that we have to give it our major attention.

But he was nourished by his *yiddishkeit,* and I remember, too, telling him at that meeting how envious I was of his generation—the last one—to be bathed in the culture of Yiddish.

For Irving, Jewishness was a mode of being, a personality. Perhaps the loss of that Yiddish culture added to his special brand of pessimism (spiced by a trace of optimism). He was both curator and interpreter of that vast rich world where the intermingling of socialism and literature was a normal way of life.

Irving, a profound believer in a CIO-style labor movement, was distressed by labor's present lack of vision. He called me during the recent Greyhound strike to express his amazement that union workers, in a Reagan/Bush America, would still care enough about their union rights to attack scab buses.

I have saved his acerbic, but attentive, criticisms of my poetry: he called one of my efforts a "characteristic poem of female sadness," adding: "those of male sadness aren't much better as a rule." Later notes, when he thought the poems got better, closed with words of encouragement: "Keep on," and "So keep on."

Rereading these letters from Irving left echoes of Beckett's *The Unnameable* in my head: "I'll go on, you must say words, as long as there are any, until they find me, until they say me . . . you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on."

His death has pushed me—many of us—out of the nest. "Finally," he would probably mutter.

The "socialist vision remains a genuine option—a profound need," he once wrote. Now more than ever. So we will keep on.

## Brian Morton

Writers sometimes write a little differently after their reputations are made. Some become mandarins in their old age—wise, all too wise. Some let the belt out a few notches and settle into verbosity.

A few, at the height of their fame, struggle to reinvent themselves or to refine their craft. These are the writers who win our admiration and our love.

Irving found his style very quickly. His earliest work displays the tense lucidity that marked his prose for the rest of his life. His voice on the page was so confident that you might have thought it came easily, but he said it didn't: he once said that he put almost everything he wrote through nine or ten drafts. In an essay on Orwell he wrote that the "discipline of the plain style—and that fierce control of self that forms its foundation—comes hard."

In the last few years, he subtly remade his writing style. His earlier voice, though lucid before all else, had been bravura, self-consciously dazzling. As he said of the prose of the New York Intellectuals, it was "the style of brilliance." Now his work became even more spare, less adorned.

He left hints about this change in two pieces he wrote for the *New Republic*. In an article about the late works of Leo Tolstoy, he described him, "deep into old age," as a writer who had worked his way "free of literary posture and the sins of eloquence." And in a review of a book by a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, published less than a month before he died, he said that Yitzhak Zuckerman "speaks plainly, without verbal flourish or the wanton rhetoric that has disfigured some writings about the Holocaust. . . . The dryness of his voice as he recalls terrible events comes to seem a sign of moral strength."

I don't know why Irving's voice grew more austere. It may be that after he had made his reputation, the claims of the self grew less insistent, and he no longer felt the need to dazzle. But I don't really believe it can be put down to personal reasons alone. I think it had something to do with his lifelong meditation on the nature of our time—the century of Auschwitz and the gulag; a time, as he wrote in *A Margin of Hope,* that "has been marked by a special terribleness." I think he belongs to the small fraternity of writers who took the experience of our century into the way they saw the world, into



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the weather of their prose. Orwell, Silone, Primo Levi . . . a few others.

In the end, there was winter in his prose, but not because he was an old man. The chaste late voice was something like a voice of witness.

I miss his curiosity, his wit, the demands of his restlessness. The sheer pressure of his intensity turned the most casual encounter—a quick lunch at the coffee shop near his house—into something electric, charged.

Everyone knows he was a steady worker, but the word "steady" doesn't say nearly enough. He devoted himself to his calling with a matchless intensity; he gave of himself as deeply as anyone can. When he'd hang up the phone without saying goodbye—his famous habit—I often found myself smiling. I took pleasure in the thought of him turning quickly back to his desk, his task, his passion.

## George Packer

When I got the telephone call with the news of Irving's death I was writing an article for *Dissent*, an article he commissioned but never saw. And the first contact I ever had with him was a reply to another article I had mailed to *Dissent*, out of the blue. "It's too long," Irving wrote back. "Cut it and we'll publish it." He included his home phone number and said to call collect if I wanted to talk further. In the eight years of our acquaintance, in which I never saw him more than once a year, these two qualities remained as constant as the man himself—his critical honesty, which inspired me even when it deflated me, and his generosity, which was at least as rare.

He came from a world very like—though not exactly the same as—my father's, who was also Jewish and five years younger, though he died much sooner. They had known each other briefly when Irving was out at Stanford University, battling New York alienation and New Left hostility and future dentists. I told Irving of the connection the first time I met him, several weeks after the arrival of that letter with the terse advice and the home phone number. He was sitting on a stage at Harvard University, where he'd just finished giving the first of his lectures on Emerson that were later published as *The American Newness*. What I remember best about that lecture was Irving's allusion to what Emerson called some human or divine principle of leveling. "I have spent my life looking for that principle," Irving said, in that voice that mixed cultivation and Bronx, "and I must confess that so far it has eluded me."

After the lecture I went up, my self-serving eagerness somewhat dampened by the brilliance of what he'd just said, and introduced myself. "You're Herb Packer's son?" Irving said. "It gives me an eerie feeling to see you standing here." His eyes moistened—to this day I don't quite know what feeling had seized him, since he and my father hadn't known each other well. But it was striking that this man who was famous for his skill at intellectual street-fighting, a skill that seemed to die out around 1950, was also capable of a moment of emotional availability with a total stranger forty years younger. There was a limit to that availability, I came to learn—Irving was also famous, among his friends, for how fast he could get off the phone, for how tight you needed to edit even casual conversation with him. But since my own father was long gone, victim in a certain way of the campus wars of the sixties that wounded Irving without killing him, the little openings I was afforded once a year or so were more than enough. Inasmuch as it was his respect I wanted more than anyone's, I would say he became a sort of father figure; inasmuch as there was no need to rebel, he was simply editor, mentor, and, I hope, friend. There must be many people for whom Irving was far more important than we were for him.

We once went for beers at his neighborhood bar in New York. It was the first—and only—time I spent more than fifteen minutes with Irving, and I was terrified. I doubted my ability to be articulate for an hour straight; I was certainly the least serious person this very serious man had ever had drinks with. Beforehand I kept running through the likely topics, as if I was getting ready for an oral exam—DSA, *Dissent*, George Bush, Saul Bellow, maybe some of the South African writers. By the time I met him outside his building my mind was blank. "I just met someone who knows you," was the first thing Irving said. "It was at a party up in New Haven—a young woman said she was from Somerville, and so I took a chance and asked if she knew you. She said yes—you just dropped her roommate like a hot potato."



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We were turning up Madison Avenue, and I was looking for a way to disappear into the dirty pavement. I half-assumed this meant the drinks were off. "I'm trying to think how to defend myself," I said. "There's no charge," Irving replied at once. "It might have been the smartest thing you ever did."

A year later I saw him at a DSA national convention in Baltimore. The Berlin Wall had fallen that week; a few months before Michael Harrington had died. Irving, stooped, white-maned, looked not just travel-weary but grief-stricken. He gave the main address, a gloomy, chiding speech in which he told the gathered democratic socialists that they had two years to reconstruct DSA, two years of hard work to turn themselves into the experts on social policy, the tireless activists and writers that Mike had been, or else DSA would become a collection of nice, irrelevant people who liked to get together once a year or so. When he took our questions, some of them were quizzical, some plaintive, some truculent. One man claimed that the fall of communism, which was happening that very moment, would mean a revival for democratic socialism all over the world, including in the United States. "My friend," Irving said, "you are living in a dream."

I had my own question for him. I pointed out that socialism has been in decline since before I was born—since before *he* was born. Why did it have only two more years to decline? "You know," Irving replied, with a look of mischievous pleasure, for he was about to get the better of a young wiseguy, "I ask the same thing about myself. You decline and decline, and then one day you just stop."

## Octavio Paz

In May, our friend Irving Howe died, one of the great figures among the so-called "New York Intellectuals." He belonged to a generation that first made itself known in the pages of the *Partisan Review,* one of the great magazines of this century in Europe or America. For a brief period, *Partisan Review* symbolized the alliance between political and aesthetic radicalism, between revolutionary thought and the artistic avant-garde. The alliance didn't last long, and *Partisan Review* became one of the battlefields on which the intellectual war of the second half of the twentieth century was waged: a political and philosophical dispute that was, as well, a fight in defense of the freedom of literary expression and against oppression and lies disguised as "socialism." Irving Howe never gave up his youthful belief in social democracy, or his moral integrity. He was an uncomfortable witness for both sides because with the same fearless intellect he reproached the imperialist policies of his own country and condemned the horrors of the Soviet regime and its satellites. From the beginning, he was a contributor to *Plural,* and later to *Vuelta* [in Mexico—Eds.]. He participated brilliantly in the conference organized by *Vuelta* in 1990 on the central issue of our century: freedom. He defended his political philosophy—social democracy—with intellectual bravery and great clarity of exposition.

I met Irving in 1970 at the home of Richard and Jeannette Silver, who were my publishers at that time. Irving had just published a lengthy and generous article in the *New York Times* on two of my books that had recently been translated into English. We quickly became friends: we were of the same camp, united by similar disappointments and hopes. But long before our first meeting I was aware of Irving's work and admired both his literary criticism and his political essays. On the recommendation of my friend the psychoanalyst Erich Fromm, I had become a faithful reader of *Dissent,* the magazine Howe edited, which was the black sheep of North American literary publications. It was a clearly leftist magazine that dared to criticize, with exemplary rigor but without rancor, both the "old left," still bogged down in the Stalinist mire, and the "new," made up of young intellectuals who were frivolous ideological tourists among Latin American, Asian, and African tyrannies half-hidden behind the mask of "socialism." Yes, the same ones who today, without going to the trouble of explaining their transformation to us, have become fervent supporters of the free market and democracy.

Besides being a free and lucid conscience, Irving Howe was also, and above all, an excellent literary critic. Certain of his essays on the modern novelists are models of penetration and limpidity. One sign of his moral breadth and literary probity: Howe recognized greatness even in writers whose ideas were the opposite of his own, such as Kipling, on whom he wrote some memorable pages. He wore



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neither the ideological blindfold nor the pedant's thick lenses. He never confused literary theory with criticism, nor did he take up the outlandish neologisms that have made literary criticism into a genre that alternates between the stony ground and the swamp. For him, literature and politics were related but separate activities: two forms, one aesthetic and the other moral, of sympathy, a stoic virtue in an ignoble time like our own. True criticism is always born from the *corps à corps*, half embrace and half combat, between the text and the reader. This was the criticism Irving Howe practiced, made of love and rigor. Here at *Vuelta* we remember our friend with affection, gratitude, and melancholy.

TRANSLATED BY ESTHER ALLEN

## Bernard Rosenberg

Not long ago Irving told me of a pact he and Alfred Kazin had made: whichever one died first would not be eulogized by the other. As it turned out, Kazin breaks the pact in these pages, as Irving would no doubt have done for him.

Their similar backgrounds notwithstanding, these two men never did warm much to each other. It was a matter of temperament, not character. In evidence, I offer an anecdote. While the neocons were riding high, Kazin, probably through some postal quirk, received an invitation to one of their conferences. He accepted, attended, and wrote a rollicking account of the affair. We read it, and after our laughter subsided, I expressed my admiration for the piece. Irving implored me to write Kazin a note saying how much pleasure this essay, along with so many others, had given me.

Not a shade of sibling rivalry there. Nor with others on the New York literary scene. But I didn't know these men. For me, Irving Howe is my many-sided man. How could it be otherwise after forty years of close association, deep friendship, and constant collegiality with their inconsequential ups and downs?

Lewis Coser was first among us at newly formed Brandeis University. I joined him and for one year we made up a strange department of sociology. Then along came an unclassifiable genius, Irving Howe, the least academic of us all.

This formidable scholar took us all by storm. He fought and won a tough battle in favor of teaching a course called Yiddish Literature. It was the only "revolutionary war" he was ever to win. And a good thing, too. For on the thought and substance of democratic socialism he left his indelible mark.

Just then all the talk was about a new political journal. I heard for the first time of Manny Geltman and Stanley Plastrik and, hardly for the first time, of Meyer Schapiro and several other devoted radicals, all ferociously opposed to Stalinism. Their presence would help us put out two to four issues of *Dissent*, as the quarterly was baptized.

And now here we are four decades later, without our principal inspiration, but going strong. No one else writes "as if born with a pencil in his mouth"—which is how Irving once characterized Dwight Macdonald.

But with Irving, *Dissent* became an obsession. Why did he invest so much energy in it? Well, he had no illusions about his own immortality, and he wanted *Dissent* to form a community for younger people and their bright and/or compassionate elders. In this task, he seems to have succeeded.

We who knew the man in his infrequent gaiety and usual melancholy realized that it was part of our job to cheer him up. I spent an inordinate amount of time doing just that. So bear with me through one more story.

A year and a half ago, when he was in bed, surrounded by well-wishers, who wisely left one by one, Irving motioned to me to stay a bit. I had told him that it was Democratic presidential primary time—and one of the candidates had quipped, "Bush was born on third base and thinks he hit a triple." Irving laughed, closed his eyes, and continued to smile. I tiptoed out. It is the way—apart from a thousand experiences, his articles, and his variegated books—I shall always remember him.

There lay a *mensch*.



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Michael Rustin

About ten years ago during a stay in the United States I was lucky enough to be invited to attend one or two meetings of the *Dissent* editorial board held (as I recall) in the living room of Simone Plastrik's apartment on the Upper West Side. Here I was able to enjoy seeing Irving Howe presiding over his editorial board, composed so far as I could tell mainly of his old and some new friends.

These few visits to *Dissent* made two powerful impressions on me. One was that this was the most *New York* of all the experiences I had, in my many visits to the city, above all in its vigorous, intelligent, ironic, and unruly good humor. The other was that I was seeing the American equivalent, thirty years on, of the original "British New Left," which had been formed in 1956, the year of Suez and Hungary, with the foundation of Edward Thompson's *New Reasoner* and the *Universities and Left Review* of Stuart Hall, Raphael Samuel, Charles Taylor, and others. The two journals were soon to merge as *New Left Review*. These journals were like *Dissent* in their determination not to be merely theoretical or academic and to give their political commitments a lively human voice. In the early 1960s, unfortunately, *New Left Review* changed direction and adopted its present aloof small-print format, hardly like *Dissent* at all. Its founders dispersed to their various fields of creative work, taking some younger political orphans along with them.

Well there in New York in 1985 one saw what might have been, had the intimate political communities around the original British New Left journals survived intact. Though there were differences, the comradely atmosphere, the unquestioned assumption of shared beliefs, and the enduring commitment to the political task, were as I had remembered from twenty-five years before.

It was as if one were visiting American relatives of one's parental generation, politically speaking, except that this group, unlike its British counterparts, had fortunately succeeded in sustaining its own project and its distinctive tradition. Although *Dissent* had no doubt at times been repetitious or self-righteous, over all these years it had essentially retained its openness to new ideas and people. It was paradoxical to me that these democratic socialists (being Americans they usually called themselves that to distinguish themselves from the other kinds) so often referred to Europe and even (then) to Britain as if they represented the main grounds for socialist hope. The close attention given by *Dissent* and in particular by Michael Harrington to European socialist ideas was often fruitful, however.

Despite the different histories of these journals of the first British and American New Lefts, there are more similarities than differences in their achievements. What has been most fundamental has been to sustain in good faith both a rejection and denunciation of the corruptions of Stalinism and state socialism, and a continued faith in the possibility of another, democratic socialism. Irving Howe and his friends showed that it was possible to go on living and writing as socialists without undue disillusionment or bitterness, without breaking the faith and becoming persecutors of one's own deepest convictions. This constancy of purpose has helped to keep the idea of socialism alive for another generation. Edward Thompson once pointed out that the *New Reasoner* had similarly enabled a generation to break decisively with the Communist party, while virtually all of its members remained on the left.

One should not pretend that those who made those discriminations in their lives did not show some scars from the experience. We would have been stronger on both sides of the Atlantic if the quarrels between Old and New Lefts had been less bitter. But I think of it as a minor miracle that a socialist magazine like *Dissent* still enjoys the vigorous life it does in the United States. It is a source of pride, and also of keen remembered enjoyment, to have known, if only to a small degree, Irving Howe, the main creator and lifelong animator of this project. One sends one's heartfelt good wishes to those who are going to carry on his work.



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## Cornel West

Irving Howe was the towering public intellectual of his generation. He was a grand long-distance runner whose commitment to the life of the mind and social justice was absolute. He reveled in an intellectual playfulness characteristic of a true lover of ideas; and he promoted a political seriousness grounded in a moral indignation at injustice. As the most New Yorkish of the New York Intellectuals—and the most wise of them—he harbored a skeptical mind, steadfast will, and oppositional temper. He wedded his incessant critiques of the status quo with a respect for those rebellious "outsiders" in literature. I consider his text *Politics and the Novel*—the first book of his I read—a minor classic and his numerous literary and political essays canonical marvels. What a way with words on the page he has! We shall not see his like again for generations—if ever, in this moment of epigoni. Long live his legacy!

## Josephine Woll

For Irving, Orwell was the model of a writer. For me, Irving was. They had much in common: passion, commitment, clarity, an eloquent simplicity. Both were plainspoken. Both trusted their instincts and judgments, and did not confuse emotion with prejudice. I usually wrote with him in mind, my ideal reader as well as ideal writer. When I hit on a phrase I especially liked, a particularly felicitous combination of adjective and noun, it was his eye and his ear, more than anyone else's, that I wanted to please. His praise was by far the sweetest.

I admired his mastery of language, his effortful rewritings that produced, ultimately, an impression of effortless ease. Even more, I admired the way he came to a book. He knew how to read. He had no patience for literary fashions, just as he had no sympathy for doctrinaire politics. He never lost sight of the people politics were supposed to speak for, and he never lost sight of the text, so often obscured by one -ism or another. He would not impose any ideology or scheme on what he believed was a piece of art. He mistrusted intellectual constructs, knowing that art would be shoved and squeezed and snipped, and would inevitably be diminished to be made to fit.

Hardly a humble man, Irving approached great literature with humility. He might be the equal, intellectually, of any author—Proust, Dickens, Tolstoy. Indeed, he was the intellectual superior of many, and knew it. But theirs was the mystery that turned thought and feeling into power and beauty, that endowed insight with grace and life; he knew that too, and appreciated the difference.

And he knew what he could do. He could, with what seemed unerring intuition, tease out the pulse of a book and make those of us with thicker fingers feel its beat. He could appreciate cleverness and wit, but he was hard to fool, and didn't mistake either one for understanding. He read new books and new authors with an openness and, if they pleased him, a generous delight that coexisted with rigorous taste. He reread books and authors he knew well with a receptivity that was never made cynical by experience, that was rather enriched by it, by his compassion and his wisdom. I don't know how he did it, and can't hope to emulate him. That was part of *his* mystery, and magic.

## Dennis Wrong

I first met Irving in Princeton in 1949 when we were both still in our twenties. We met through the group or network that nearly twenty years later he christened the "New York Intellectuals." He was already moving to the very center of the group while I was an obscure hanger-on, but our identification with it was the basis of our friendship. Knowledge of the traditions of the left, cosmopolitanism, an acute sense of the historical moment, a passionate belief in the power of rational argument, highbrow literary standards, especially a taste for modernist writers—these were



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the traits virtually definitive of what it meant to be an "intellectual."

Irving hardly needed me to talk to about literature with Blackmur, Berryman, Schwartz, and Bellow all present in Princeton during those years. Politics and social criticism were another matter—I remember our reading, discussing, and both of us sometimes reviewing, Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd,* Mills's *White Collar,* Milosz's *The Captive Mind,* and Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism.* Irving lent me his review copy from *Time* of Ellison's *The Invisible Man,* insisting that I read it at once. Arendt's great book stirred both of us deeply, and I have always appreciated that forever afterwards Irving understood that, although I am not Jewish, I shared entirely his feelings about the Final Solution and his judgment of its surpassing significance. When a few years ago we attended a private advance showing of Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah,* he did not hesitate to deplore in the intermission the outpouring of "Holocaust kitsch" that stood in such contrast to the depth and seriousness of Lanzmann's production.

We used to argue a lot about politics, especially when Irving was writing his "This Age of Conformity" piece for *Partisan Review.* I had come to believe that the emerging Keynesian-welfare state liberalism of the day had reduced both the need for and the likelihood of socialism. Schlesinger's "vital center" also appealed to me, as did elements of the "end of ideology" argument (although a few years later, in *Dissent,* I became one of the first critics of that notion). All of these tendencies were among Irving's targets in the *PR* article. He was still a member of Shachtman's Independent Socialist League and a firm, if highly sophisticated, Marxist. One thing we totally agreed on, however, was the threat to civil liberties posed by Senator Joseph McCarthy and the failure of the leading New York intellectual organs to take it sufficiently seriously. As a result of our agreement I was almost literally "present at the creation" of *Dissent* when Irving and I and our then wives met with the Buttingers, whose pledge of a financial contribution, in what is by now an oft-told tale, put *Dissent* in business. I wrote an article analyzing McCarthyism that appeared in *Dissent's* first year and was my own first full-length article on politics. But because I was not sure that I considered myself any longer a "socialist," I did not join the editorial board until nearly a decade later when Irving once again invited me, and other good friends were prominent on the masthead. We both shared the hopeful spirit of the early sixties that he so well recalls in *A Margin of Hope.*

Over the years Irving's personal quality that most struck me was his enormous generosity of mind and spirit and how it grew and deepened over time. His still somewhat doctrinaire politics and his sense of isolation in Princeton, reported in *A Margin of Hope,* obscured these qualities a bit when I first knew him, although his intense and selfless commitment to ideas, to literature, and to democratic values was fully evident. Someone who knew him well then and had not seen him for years remarked the other day that he was "*never* mean or small or cheap." His seriousness and his generosity made him a real "role model," to use a much abused term, to the young, even to those who did not share his political commitments, to a degree that surprised me in the memorials for him. It shouldn't have, for, though only a few years younger, I was myself drawn into his orbit and a few years in one's twenties or early thirties are equivalent to a decade or two in later life.

Irving stood for something, and I don't mean just for socialism, the literary avant-garde, the New York intellectuals, or even respect for the world of our fathers (who were not, of course, *my* fathers). Generally, he stood for, even incarnated, the best traditions of liberalism, socialism, and Jewish emancipation. He also stood for the autonomy of the imagination expressed in literature; I think it was his literary sensibility that powerfully contributed to his generosity of mind and spirit. It was not just that he was capable of valuing reactionaries like Dostoevsky, James, or Eliot as great writers: he was able to see that they were great writers partly *because of* their reactionary perspectives on modern life. More specifically, Irving stood for memory, for the importance of not forgetting the historical or personal past, a signal value in this obsessively present-minded country and age.

Another thing we shared back in the fifties was a strong admiration for George Orwell. We both would have applauded Philip Rieff's contemporary description of Orwell as "our dear, dead secular saint of the Left." Orwell was given to understatement, but Irving would understand the tribute I mean to pay him in writing of him what Orwell wrote of Gandhi: "How clean a smell he managed to leave behind!" □



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Nicolaus Mills

# REMEMBERING CESAR CHAVEZ

Had he been killed in midlife, as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King were, Cesar Chavez would be one of those 1960s figures whose name brings instant recognition and a lump in the throat. We would speak of him today as the Chicano labor leader who was about to transform the lives of the nation's farm workers when an assassin's bullet intervened.

There was, however, no such dramatic arc to Cesar Chavez's life. His death this past April at age sixty-six was front-page news. An estimated thirty five thousand people traveled to Delano, California, for his funeral, and by order of the governor state flags were lowered to half-mast. But for anyone who didn't come of age in the 1960s or wasn't involved with the United Farm Workers, Cesar's passing drew few tears. Like Bob Dylan or Eugene McCarthy or Eldridge Cleaver, he had turned into an embodiment of the past. He seemed to illustrate nothing so much as how remote recent history can become.

I was one of those for whom Cesar's death did cause tears. Like everyone my age, I remember exactly what I was doing when John Kennedy was killed. Three decades from now I will be able to remember what I was doing when a friend called to say that Cesar had died in his sleep while on union business in the small border town of San Luis, Arizona.

I first met Cesar Chavez on a hot June day in 1967. I had come to Delano, California, to work for the United Farm Workers. Cesar was already a legend, the leader of a union whose struggle, *La Causa*, seemed straight out of the 1930s. I had not expected him to be so approachable, but there he was, sitting on the grass outside the union's headquarters, a small stucco bungalow known as the Pink House.

He was wearing, as he usually did, an open-necked cotton shirt that hung outside his trousers, and although the union was in the midst of strike preparations, he gave the impression of being a man who thought the best use he could make of his time was to spend it listening to what those around him had to say. It was a first meeting that shaped my sense of how anyone who leads others, especially an organizer, should behave.

Twenty-six years later it was hard to imagine Cesar having time for such a conversation or feeling as hopeful as he had in 1967. The union had come a long way since 1962, when Cesar first arrived in Delano to begin organizing it. The Farm workers blazed brightly in the 1960s and 1970s, drawing the support of students and trade unionists. After Jerry Brown became governor of California, the union was the driving force behind the California legislature's passage of the Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975, the first collective bargaining act, outside of Hawaii's, for farm workers, and arguably still the best state labor law in America.

As a result of the union's national grape boycott, an estimated seventeen million Americans stopped buying grapes. But in recent years the union was a shadow of its former self. At its peak in the 1970s, the Farm Workers had over seventy thousand members, but today its membership has dropped to an estimated five thousand. The Farm Workers were hurt by the Reagan era and by two conservative Republican governors, George Deukmejian and Pete Wilson, who undermined the administration of California's Agricultural Labor Relations Act. Since passage of the 1986 Immigration Reform Act, the union has also had to cope with record numbers of legal and illegal immigrants, who have been used by growers to bring down wages and blunt Farm Workers organizing.

Most significantly, under Cesar's direction the union itself changed dramatically. Cesar became friends with Charles Dederich, the founder of Synanon, the drug rehabilitation program, and what followed from that friendship was a new authoritarian style of union leadership. The "Synanon Game"—group encounters in which individuals are subject to intense personal criticism—was introduced into the Farm Workers. Dissidents found themselves forced out of the union after they ran



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their own slate of candidates for the board of directors. By the middle 1980s the union had lost its core of veteran staffers as well as much of its ability to organize effectively.

What shapes my sense of Cesar's importance is not, however, the difference between the promise he offered agricultural workers and the contracts he delivered. What shapes it is my memory of how Cesar bore the demands hero status created for him.

"Saints should always be judged guilty until they are proved innocent," George Orwell wrote in his famous "Reflections on Gandhi." It was an irony that Cesar, who combined Catholicism and Gandhian nonviolence, would have appreciated. Because of his long fasts, the marches he led, the near poverty he chose, Cesar was treated as a holy man, and he struggled hard to make sure those around him realized that the self-discipline he practiced expressed not a desire for holiness but a will to control the moral and social outrage that fueled him. He knew that the union battles he led could easily get out of hand, give in to violent shortcuts that might make a victory easier but would rob the union of the mission he saw at its core: that of transforming the lives of those who joined it.

The speech of Cesar's that is most often quoted is one that he was too weak to deliver himself. It was read for him at the end of his twenty-five-day fast in 1968. "When we are really honest with ourselves," he wrote, "we must admit that our lives are all that really belong to us. So it is how we use our lives that determines what kind of men we are. It is my deepest belief that only by giving our lives do we find life."

But the words of Cesar that I remember best came in a story I heard him tell in 1967 in a rally in Bakersfield for the grape workers who would soon find themselves locked in a strike against Giumarra Vineyards. The union had rented a large hall for the rally, and by the time it was Cesar's turn to speak, it was over 100 degrees inside. In a conversational tone he said simply, "I want to tell a story about a man with a whip. He could flick the ashes off a man's cigarette while he smoked it, even pull a handkerchief out of a pocket with his whip, and because of his temper and his reputation, everyone was afraid of him . . . .

"One day, as the man was sitting on his porch, a bee came buzzing around him. It flew in his hair and around his ears and didn't pay any attention when he tried to brush it away. One of the man's workers was passing by at the time, and when he noticed what was happening, he was very surprised. 'Why don't you use your whip on the bee?' he asked. 'It's no bigger than any of the other things you've gone after.' But the man with the whip just smiled. 'I can kill the bee all right. That would be easy for someone like me,' he answered. 'But bees are different from anything I've whipped before. If you go after one, they all come after you. So if I took my whip to this bee, there would be the whole hive to fight.' "

Cesar paused for a moment. "That is what the union means," he said. "The union is like the bees, and the man with the whip is like the grower. He cannot do anything to one of us without having all of us come after him."

There could not have been more than a few seconds' pause before the crowd began cheering. But it seemed to take forever, and I remembered feeling the silence was more important than the shouting that came after it. *La huelga*, the word for strike, had never crossed Cesar's lips. There was no need for him to say it. What he had talked about that afternoon was a coming together that would take the form of a strike, and the silence that followed his speech, like the silence that follows a prayer in church, was natural, a sign that everything he said had been understood.

Most of that summer I got up at three each morning to drive to Bakersfield to meet with several work crews. I had the task, along with another organizer, of keeping them out of the grape fields when a strike began. We always worried that when it came time to leave the fields fear might get the best of our crews. But on the August morning when the strike began, our job was suddenly easy. At six o'clock, when the fields should have been filled with workers, nothing was going on.

The following week the Giumarra Vineyards succeeded in temporarily breaking the strike by bringing in nonunion crews from Texas and Arizona and border cities like Calexico. The union would finally need a national grape boycott to win the strike. But I always believed the strike was won on that hot Saturday in Bakersfield.

Cesar understood that the real work of organizing always comes down to one-on-one contact. That's what the conversation outside the Pink House, as well as the story of the whip and the bee, were about. A good organizer in Cesar's eyes wasn't a salesman or a person who performed superhuman feats. He was someone who understood the humiliation of being poor and made it possible for others to imagine themselves overcoming that humiliation.

During that summer in Delano, we all grumbled about the $5 we were paid for a week's work, but



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the grumbling was ironic, not bitter. Our commitment to the union was so complete that once we had made it we could only joke about it. "Don't bother him! He's eating right now," Manuel Chavez, Cesar's cousin, would shout at visitors when too many of them came to see Cesar during his 1968 fast. I can't imagine any current public figure who in the midst of such a trial would be so willing to give those around him a chance to acknowledge their doubts. Nothing made Cesar so uneasy as the idea that the admiration he drew might paralyze others. In one period of his life he took to wearing a mezuzah around his neck. "Why?" he was asked by people who knew how serious a Catholic he was. His answer rarely changed. "Well, Jesus never wore a cross," he deadpanned.

In a union in which Spanish was the first language and Chicanos made up the majority of the rank and file, it was a reply that said everyone was welcome. But beyond that, it was a reply that made it clear that in Cesar's judgment Jesus wasn't preoccupied with his impending martyrdom. He saw a sacred mission in tending to the ordinary. □

## Jerry Monaco

### SKUNK HOUR IN HOLLYWOOD

It wasn't good, but it was harmless."

"Harmless and popular."

Thus went an exchange after the movie *Sleepless in Seattle*. But, I wondered, could there be harm in sentimental romantic pabulum?

The plot is harmless enough. Architect Sam Baldwin's wife dies, leaving him alone with his eight-year-old son, Jonah. Grief unhinges him, and the facile solutions suggested to him by his workmates—therapy, vacation, work—don't appeal to him, so he chooses another facile solution—he moves to Seattle. Jonah is worried about his father, and around Christmas calls up a nationally broadcast radio show to share his worries. Soon the father is on the line talking about his grief and his magical life with his wife. Baltimore reporter Annie Reed (Meg Ryan) falls in love on first listen. Annie's unsatisfied because there's no magic in her love—her fiancé is boring, allergic, sexless, a mere function of the plot. The movie alternates between Annie and Sam; the two principals don't actually meet until the last minute of the last reel. Of course it's the boy who engineers their meeting—on top of the Empire State Building, on Valentine's Day.

*Sleepless in Seattle* is such a saccharine confection that its popularity puzzled me. Every scene is two or three minutes long and swells to aching emotion, with the help of some old standard sung by Nat King Cole or Louis Armstrong—in other words, the scenes are structured like AT&T commercials, with a small story line and a set-up leading to a sentimental punch aimed at the viewer's lumpy throat. The director, Nora Ephron, has the integrity or temerity to expose her method—one of her characters talks about how Bell telephone advertisements make her cry. Crying is reserved exclusively for the female characters. I have never seen so many actresses cry so many times in one movie. Anything can set off the tears: listening to a radio show, watching an old movie, or merely talking about an old movie. If tears fall for nothing then what are they worth? Without significance in the overall plot, grief is meaningless.

The universe of *Sleepless in Seattle* consists of late-night radio talk shows, sentimental television commercials, mediocre Hollywood movies, and old pop songs written by Hoagey Carmichael, a never-never land of magical romance. So why is the movie so popular? It must be due to the complete lack of romance in current Hollywood movies: a movie that merely refers to romance is eaten up as the real thing. This, at least, was my first hypothesis, but there's more going on here. At one point Annie's best friend says, "You don't want to be in love. You want to be in love in a movie." Ephron herself told *Premier* magazine that *Sleepless in Seattle* was about love in the movies. Or perhaps the movie is about how many allusions to other movies the audience can catch in one viewing. There are references to *An Affair to Remember, Breakfast at Tiffany's, Casablanca, North by Northwest, Philadelphia Story, The Dirty Dozen,* and *Fatal Attraction*. (Apparently men have a "fatal attraction" and women have "an affair to remember.") *Sleepless* is a cut-and-paste job composed of old movies; it is pleasant but hollow. It doesn't evoke emotion, just alludes to it. And this is the trick, the real reason for the movie's popularity. With its mish-mash of allusions, it winks at the audience, one of those in-jokes that everybody is in on, flattering us that we're in-the-know, superior to all of this romantic hocus-pocus, while at the same time allowing for acceptance of the sentimental. The utter predictability of the film is part of the film itself: the audience is flattered by its ability to see through it all. At the end of *Sleepless in Seattle*, atop the Empire State Building, Baldwin's son waits for Annie, who doesn't show up. Sam finds him and



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they leave together. The observation deck closes just as Annie arrives. The woman behind me said, "The boy leaves his backpack and Sam will come back to get it." Exactly. It was very satisfying to predict this ending. The movie is popular because it provides us with easy wishes that are fulfilled as soon as we make them.

Curious, the similarities between the light-hearted cynicism of *Sleepless in Seattle* and the creepy insidiousness of *Indecent Proposal*. The leading male characters share the same, profession, both movies alternate between the consciousnesses of the male and female leads, both make reference to Susan Faludi's *Backlash* and seem to align themselves against Faludi's feminism, both are built on references to old movies, and both claim that love is destiny.

Woody Harrelson and Demi Moore play a middle-class husband and wife, high-school sweethearts with big dreams. All the big dreams happen to be his, but the film-makers don't seem to notice this. He's an architect who wants to be great, and she becomes a real estate agent to help him fulfill his promise. They mortgage everything and hire contractors so that he can build his ideal beach house (which looks something like a stable with a silo attached). But the recession hits, he loses his job, she's unable to sell property, and the loan on the half-completed masterpiece is coming due. They need $50,000 quick. What better way to get it than to borrow $5,000 dollars from Dad and head to Las Vegas to make the rest? The first night they win $25,000 and, surprise, the second night they lose it all. But John Gage, famous billionaire, as lonely as Charles Foster Kane and with a habit of paraphrasing *Citizen Kane* and *The Great Gatsby* sees the wife, falls in love on first sight, and offers the husband a million dollars if she will sleep with him. At first the couple says no, but after a sleepless night they say yes. What are the consequences? David becomes insanely jealous and the couple breaks up under the strain. Gage pursues Diana, wins her, and then magnanimously gives her up because he sees that she loves David and David loves her more than he could ever have known. Love conquers all and the couple gets back together in the soft focus of the fog-shrouded pier where they proposed to each other.

*Indecent Proposal* is more convincing about money than it is about sex or love. In the best scene David and Diana are in a hotel room in Las Vegas. David counts the money he has just won in the casino downstairs. Diana lies on the water bed in her underwear; David throws the money at her, a handful at a time. She lolls around in the money, bathes in it, rubs it on her body and gives him a come-hither look. Soon they're making love, crunching the money between their bodies. The camera focuses on the money as much as on the actors. The money itself is a sex object. (I'm not sure Marx had this in mind when he wrote about the fetishism of commodities.) The makers of *Indecent Proposal* are not playing this scene for a joke. They are serious. One way Hollywood sells its commodity of images is by sexualizing the images. Since money is the most desired object in our culture, then why not make love to it? As a screenwriter once told me, "If it can't be overdone then it shouldn't be done at all."

The *New York Times* quoted *Indecent Proposal's* director Adrian Lyne as saying, "The idea of being a whore for a night is kind of exciting for women." But the movie deserves more credit than this statement allows. *Indecent Proposal* is a didactic film; it made me wonder what Bertolt Brecht or Bernard Shaw would have done with all of this. Shaw would have made it into a comedy illustrating that prostitution is what capitalism is all about. Brecht would have given us a view of the larger social system and wouldn't have pretended that the middle-class world of the couple is the only one that is normal and real. The movie would have been a tragedy of sorts. Unfortunately it is more like a Hollywood version of socialist realism. It keeps insisting that greed is bad and money can't buy love, while letting the romance of money steal all the good scenes. And who can believe that Demi Moore would leave Robert Redford, with all of his charm and billions, for Woody Harrelson? The happy ending is pasted onto a movie that does everything it can to convince us that money *can* buy love.

In the past decade three movies about prostitution captured something of the spirit of the times: *Risky Business, Pretty Woman*, and *Indecent Proposal*. *Risky Business* was about capitalist success: a teenager meets a prostitute, opens a brothel and makes $8,000. The teenager is a Reaganite hero and the movie is a true emblem of the go-go eighties. (See Nicolaus Mills's sharp review in the Spring 1984 *Dissent*.) *Pretty Woman* is a Cinderella story where the prostitute finds a rich prince to lift her from the streets. A rich man is hard to find, but once a gal has found him that's all that matters. This movie defines a kind of backlash against feminism. *Indecent Proposal* does a good job of playing to middle-class anxiety and male feelings of inadequacy. The



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Woody Harrelson character is inadequate because he has lost his job and is not as rich as the Robert Redford character. In each of these movies the happy endings are unconvincing.

Why think about two movies that are negligible as works of art? Because both movies are popular Hollywood standards, and both illustrate something about those of us who watch them. I was taken in by both of them and yet kicked myself for being taken in. I don't think my divided reaction was unusual, but it's easier to ignore one or the other. We either let ourselves sponge up the sentimentality or we become cynical about all sentiment. Both reactions ignore something important about ourselves and the movies we watch. These movies teach us that love is magic or else it is nothing.

My first encounters with romance and love were in the Hollywood movies I watched as a child, and I've never recovered. No matter how hard I try, I can't separate *Bringing Up Baby, Spellbound, Casablanca*, Astaire and Rogers, Bogart and Bacall from my everyday experience of love and lust, sex and sensibility. Though I try to remain skeptical and detached, I am entangled in the net of Hollywood. Is there anything wrong with this? Terrence McNally's beautiful film *The Long Day Closes* movingly shows a boy whose only relief from a dreary and brutal life in working-class Liverpool is the romance of movies. But why do we need the magic of romance? Because in a society that is spiritually bereft—diminished in family feeling, community connections, and class solidarity—it gives significance to life, it explains our suffering and separateness. The lost individual need only find the magical other to transform his or her life. If work is meaningless, and solidarity with our fellow humans seems impossible, then what else is there but the simple solidarity of love, the explanatory principle of romance as a destiny to live for above all others, the love that will save us? □

## It's War!, Says Mr. Kristol

What began to concern me more and more were the clear signs of rot and decadence germinating within American society—a rot and decadence that was no longer the consequence of liberalism but was the actual agenda of contemporary liberalism. And the more contemporary, the more candid and radical was this agenda.

For me, then, "neo-conservatism" was an experience of moral, intellectual, and spiritual liberation. I no longer had to pretend to believe—what in my heart I could no longer believe—that liberals were wrong because they subscribe to this or that erroneous opinion on this or that topic. No—liberals were wrong, liberals are wrong, because they are liberals. What is wrong with liberalism is liberalism—a metaphysics and a mythology that is woefully blind to human and political reality. Becoming a neo-conservative, then, was the high point of *my* cold war.

It is a cold war that, for the last twenty-five years, has engaged my attention and energy, and continues to do so. There is no "after the Cold War" for me. So far from having ended, my cold war has increased in intensity, as sector after sector of American life has been ruthlessly corrupted by the liberal ethos. It is an ethos that aims simultaneously at political and social collectivism on the one hand, and moral anarchy on the other.

Irving Kristol, the *National Interest*, Spring 1993 □



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Irving Howe

# HISTORY AND LITERATURE

CULTURE AND IMPERIALISM, by Edward Said. Alfred A. Knopf, 1993. 380 pp. $25.00.

There are two Edward Saids. One is a literary scholar and critic, cultivated, knowledgeable, and, notwithstanding his interest in the literature of the third world, a traditionalist in taste. The other is a spokesman for the Palestinian cause and adherent of the PLO, polemical and sometimes, as happens in political disputes, strident. Now there is no necessary contradiction between the two, and it ought to be possible for one person to answer two callings. But in the bruising course of actuality, it's often hard to avoid confusions and blurrings of role. I say this not with hostile intent, but in recognition of the costs involved.

The two Saids alternate, sometimes fuse, throughout *Culture and Imperialism*. This new book is partly an indictment of imperialism—at times maddeningly repetitive and lacking in analytical rigor, but still, I think, largely right in its argument. In part, it is also a study of how imperialism left its mark on the cultures, especially the literatures, of the West—and here the writing is often keen and fresh.

The cultures of the West, argues Said, have been filled with explicit and tacit acceptance of imperialism as both historical phenomenon and ideological rationale. Embedded in the rationales for imperialism, continues Said, has been a strong current of racism, the notion that the "white man" is somehow, perhaps inherently, superior to peoples of color. And what is quite remarkable in looking back at Western culture is how little acknowledgment has been made by literary critics and cultural historians of the impact of imperialism.

For his denunciation of imperialism Said has been attacked by hostile reviewers. Plugged in to the zeitgeist, they have dismissed Said's book as a mere repetition of "leftist" rhetoric or, a bit more charitably, as an assault upon something that has largely faded out of existence. These attacks are unwarranted. Notwithstanding occasional lapses into cant, Said is entirely right on this matter: imperialism was and remains a social evil denying the right of autonomy to millions of people. The rationales that too many intellectuals improvised in its behalf are indefensible. Nor is the fact that in many ex-colonies in Africa and the Middle East the withdrawal of imperial powers was followed by notoriously brutal local dictatorships a sufficient reason for nostalgia for "the good old days" of imperial rule.

Morally, then, Said's pages about the evils of imperialism are not to be faulted, even if we recognize that they might have been stronger had he included a few paragraphs about the Stalinist domination of Eastern Europe, arguably a version of imperialism, and about the role of the Arabs in the slave trade of Africa, also a version of imperialism.

Analytically, however, Said's section on imperialism is weakened by the absence of a coherent theoretical account of what he means by that term. It is not enough to point to Western domination of African and Middle Eastern countries. Is imperialism something that has persisted through the ages or is it to be seen as especially linked with recent history? Is the main impetus behind it a drive for economic gain (for example, Lenin's theory that modern imperialism is motored by a need to export surplus capital)? Is it inseparable from capitalist societies or a policy that some nations can choose to adopt and others not? Is it driven by an ineradicable hunger for power and therefore a force that social decision cannot stamp out? Is imperialism confined to the West or is it a universal phenomenon?

These are familiar but basic questions that should

This review was written by Irving Howe shortly before he died in early May of this year.—EDS.



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be confronted in a book such as Said has written. But they are not. As a result, imperialism becomes a sort of all-purpose term of condemnation, which would be quite OK for pamphleteering but not for serious work. (Said might have found a useful comprehensive survey of theories of imperialism in the late Henry Pachter's article in the Sept.–Oct. 1970 *Dissent*, though it may be too much to expect him to turn to this source. After all, a chap has to draw the line somewhere.)

Quite the best part of Said's book is a section in which he discusses the failure of traditional literary criticism, whether formalist or socially inflected, to deal with the presence of empire in nineteenth-century European and especially English fiction. Here Said makes a real contribution. I'm told that there has been a fair amount of specialized study recently that deals with this topic, but since I've not kept up with it I can't judge how much Said's discussion owes to previous scholars. The important thing, however, is that Said is the first influential critic to write extensively on this subject.

Said's own handling of it is uneven. Sometimes he presses too hard, and other times he stops too soon.

In a brief discussion of Dickens's *Great Expectations* he notes that Magwitch, the convict whom the central character, Pip, has helped many years earlier, now returns from Australia to England, a wealthy man intent upon enriching Pip. At the time this novel is set, Australia was a penal colony notorious for the hard life imposed on convicts sent from England. Said indicates—he isn't very clear about this point—that Dickens has somehow to be faulted for not considering the special nature of Australia as part of the English imperial system.

I think this criticism is not persuasive. *Great Expectations* finds its moral climax or thematic fulfillment in the final willingness, after much resistance, of the snobbish young Pip to accept Magwitch as a sort of surrogate father. The main concern of the novel is with the way a sense of moral fraternity can overcome barriers of social caste, and for this theme it barely matters where Magwitch has come from or how he has made his money. (Dickens's readers surely knew what Australia stood for.) What matters is the relationship between convict and young swell. Australia is, so to say, beyond the novel's boundary of relevance.

More cogent is the problem Said raises regarding Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*. (He isn't the first to do so, though he fails to mention that.) In Jane Austen's novel we are shown an early nineteenth-century country house in which a prosperous English gentleman, Sir Thomas Bertram, presides over a well-ordered, conservative style of life. As the novel opens, Sir Thomas has to visit the West Indies to look after his plantation, and during his absence some mildly disorderly events occur in the course of amateur theatricals arranged by his children. Only when Sir Thomas returns are things set aright. There are other plot lines, but these we must here neglect.

The business with Sir Thomas and the West Indies—his visit is not described, only mentioned—can leave a present-day reader with a feeling of uneasiness. Shown to be the right-thinking if somewhat rigid overseer of social order, Sir Thomas goes off to the West Indies at a time when slave labor dominated those islands, so that his estate must have been based on slavery. The central female character of *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Price, even asks her uncle Thomas about the slave trade, but her question is met with a "dead silence."

The discomfort we may feel about this episode is likely to qualify the pleasure we take in reading this novel. But what degree of discomfort? Here the slave trade does fall within the novel's boundaries of relevance, as (in my opinion) Australia does not with regard to *Great Expectations*. The distinction I am suggesting between Dickens vis à vis Australia and Jane Austen vis à vis the West Indies cannot be sustained by hard-and-fast evidence; it is what in sports is called a judgment call (as so many opinions about literature must be). So it seems to me that what happened to Magwitch in Australia does not centrally shape his relationship with Pip—which is based on a memory of kindness enacted many years ago. But that Jane Austen's Sir Thomas draws his income from slaves while still being presented as an upright moral figure must affect our view of *Mansfield Park*.

Said describes acutely the problem of Sir Thomas's journey to the West Indies, yet he is also correct, I believe, in calling *Mansfield Park* a great novel. The two things—moral judgment and critical estimate—stand in his book side by side, as discrete observations. But I wonder how it is possible to advance the moral judgment without, to some degree, affecting the critical estimate. Although it would be foolish to allow our moral uneasiness about the West Indies reference to negate our admiration for this novel, it seems implausible that we can simply align moral judgment and critical estimate as separate observations and let it go at that. Said approaches this problem, indeed, brings his readers to it, but then fails to confront it head-on.



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A similar difficulty arises regarding Said's sensitive analysis of Kipling's *Kim*. If Kipling in this novel accepts uncritically the benign role of British imperialism—and he does—how does that affect his marvelously sympathetic treatment of Indian life?

Said writes that "we are naturally entitled to read *Kim* as a novel belonging to the world's greatest literature, free to some degree from its encumbered historical and political circumstances." Yes; but then he adds that "by the same token we must not unilaterally abrogate the connections [in the book] . . . to its contemporary actuality." By "contemporary actuality" Said means that Kipling saw India, without hesitation, as rightly "part of the empire." Said is on firm ground in saying that *Kim* should not be treated "reductively as imperialist propaganda," but he fails, again, to consider the question: how does the acceptance of imperialism, more blatant in Kipling than in Jane Austen, affect our response to the novel? It's not that I have a quick or easy answer to such questions, but in a book with Said's title such questions ought to be confronted.

Further in *Culture and Imperialism* there is a helpful chapter on fiction from third world cultures. And finally he ends with a somewhat ragged chapter acknowledging that many of the post-colonial nations, as these employ the slogans of nationalism and sometimes Marxism, have proved sadly disappointing to those who hoped for "liberationist" outcomes. Again, there is an attack on Western powers, especially the United States, for their recent dealings with "underdeveloped" countries. Much of this is pertinent, but it would be more so had Said remarked that the values he espouses are essentially those of the Enlightenment, a historical contribution of the West. The two Saids again seem a little uncomfortable with one another. Still, his espousal of "liberation," vague as it is, seems attractive in this time of soured expectations. That he has trouble defining this "liberation" is a problem by no means confined to him. □


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Christopher Hitchens

## THE NEW COMPLAINERS

CULTURE OF COMPLAINT: THE FRAYING OF AMERICA, by Robert Hughes. Oxford University Press, 1992. 224 pp. $19.95.

*Times have changed*
*And we've often rewound the clock*
*Since the Puritans got a shock*
*When they landed on Plymouth Rock.*
*If today*
*Any shock they should try to stem,*
*'Stead of landing on Plymouth Rock,*
*Plymouth Rock would land on them.*

Cole Porter, *Anything Goes,* 1934

*"We didn't land on Plymouth Rock. Plymouth Rock landed on us!"*

Malcolm in Spike Lee's *X,* 1992

In the 1960s, while exiled in Algeria from the intensifying ruthlessness of the apartheid state, the leaders of the "black consciousness" Pan African Congress sent a letter to Evelyn Waugh. They had, they told him solemnly, read his novel *Black Mischief.* They wished to know where he had found the name "Azania," given in the book to a hellhole of corrupt *negritude* in what Waugh would never have called the third world. And why did they wish to know? They desired a name for the future liberated South Africa, and this had struck them as a most apt and euphonious one. Waugh wrote back from his country house informing the PAC curtly (and as it happens, erroneously) that Azania was a derivation of an old Hellenistic name for a mythical African slave kingdom. As a result of this bizarre correspondence, while the multiracial and leftist ANC continues to call South Africa "South Africa" as a matter of internationalist principle, the name "Azania" appears on Steven Biko's tombstone and in less lapidary form in the acronyms of separatist and tribalist groups like AZAPO, who are swift to denounce "sellouts" like Nelson Mandela for borrowing the colonial terminology of the oppressor.

There ought to be neither shame nor surprise in the fact that macho Malcolm X—who wouldn't even own to a "Eurocentric" surname—annexed a good line from the white homosexual lyricist who composed *You're The Top,* or that African outcasts had to apply for the name of their country to the disdainful author of *Scoop.* A common culture, or stock of references, will lead to borrowings and innovations and cross-pollinations much more daring, when deliberate, and much more startling when unconscious, than that. This is one reason among many for considering the enterprise of discrete ethnic discourses and separatist canons to be doomed as well as silly. There will always *be* mutual linguistic and cultural exchange, just as there will always *be* some kind of canon. It is futile to expect, let alone to wish, that only slaves write about slavery, only women about rape, only Jews about the *Shoah.* And it will always be particularly pointless and perhaps sinister to expect or demand this in America.

The American demotic language is a pungent blend of everything from the black pulpit to the Yiddish shrug, from the official emancipatory documents written by English slavers and gentleman-farmers to the mix of Cajun, Spanish, Calabrian and Gaelic. Who does not say, or get, "*Vaya con dios,*" "donnybrook," "*omertà,*" "For he's a jolly good fellow," "Jacob's ladder," or "What's not to like?" And those are only the clichés. The whole tendency of American speech and usage has been, often to the shock of fastidious European travelers, one of pith and directness. The midwestern farmer, the Harlem preacher, the blue-collar barman (I have, for obvious reasons, exempted the Manhattan cabbie) are all rightly famous, far beyond these shores, for wanting you to get the point with a minimum of delay. And "demotic," here, has a definite relation to "democratic."

However, and largely for reasons of status-yearning and insecurity, there has always been an opposing tendency. All languages and cultures have a version of this, but there may be a specifically American need to take refuge in euphemism and insipid gentility. "Will he know what this is in regards to?", trills the half-educated and half-paid secretary when you telephone the pseudoposh publishing executive. "Sir, that's not our policy," says an easily fired minder in some store that won't keep its word. "Inappropriate" is bad. "Comfortable with" is good. "Insensitive" is the term used by the sort of people prone to announce that they themselves "feel badly." While of course, American bureaucratic and military coinages—"downsizing," "collateral damage," "interdict"—are justly notorious on a world scale for their crude muffling of moral consequence and their subordination to the ends of power.

Robert Hughes, for whom the human tongue is more of an organ than it is a muscle or a tissue, happily combines the no-bull traditions of his native



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Australia and a long engagement with high culture. He is the revenge upon the Philistines; a man who can mix it up in saloons and horse fairs as well as in salons and ateliers, and who can be elevated without condescension. If large numbers of Americans are willing to queue that extra half-hour to see an exposition of Goya or an evocation of the lost symbiosis of Andalusia, it is partly due to Hughes's careful, witty, but not too-popular essays and presentations in, of all places, *Time* magazine.

Magnetized toward America by the breadth and liberty and candor of its culture, Hughes has something of the zeal of the immigrant. Seeing American mores and language being encased in a cocoon spun from blather and drool, he has sprung forward to wake the sleeper before the threads can congeal into a carapace. The "recovery" movement with its alarming humorless narcissism; the "national security" babble of the state; the Balkanization of the academy; the Prohibitionist and "family values" crowd who watch too much television—he lays about them all, and sees that they are all aspects of the same enervating self-pity and solipsism. As befits the expatriated descendant of Irish immigrants to the Antipodes, also, he is suspicious of all claims made by those who fetishize the pure authenticity and authority of the indigenous (suppose there to be any such thing in the first place):

> Aztec culture was messianic and invasive and imperialistic; it had been so ever since the Aztecs came down from the north, under the command of a charismatic ruler whose name translates as Hummingbird-on-the-Left, and slaughtered or enslaved the resident people around Mexico City. I suppose the survivors could be glad that there was no Hummingbird-on-the-Right.

This is worth excerpting partly because it's funny but also because it conveys in miniature something that Hughes spends slightly too much time proving in general. He himself, he wants to make clear in various throat-clearing passages, is not a cultural reactionary. His sympathies are with the Enlightenment and the humanist left tradition (he's written his own *hommage* to Catalonia). He found it absurd that his relatives in Australia used such a skewed Anglocentric optic that they alluded to "the Far East" when they could only have meant that "near North" which holds East Timor and Papua New Guinea. He has some sympathy for those who complain (you should pardon the expression) that Africa is omitted from the historical record. He wants us to know that he has nothing in common with Jesse Helms or with those who would burn books but forbid others to burn flags. Indeed, Hughes tellingly quotes the Helms amendment, which attempted to cut off public funding for artistic displays involving indecency *à la* Mapplethorpe. Article Three of this Philistine legislation sought to impose a ban upon: "Material which denigrates, debases or reviles a person, group or class of citizens on the basis of race, sex, creed, handicap, age or national origin." Here is Helms annexing the discourse of political correctness. But at whose expense is such an irony: the irony of the equal-opportunity bigot?

It occurs to me that Hughes's deftly made point may not have an irony at all. In other words, that there are those in the "empowerment community" who mean business about regulating speech and expression. Let us just pause and shake ourselves for a second while the implications percolate. *For the first time in American history, those who call for an extension of rights are also calling for an abridgement of speech.*

I believe that I am right about this. The Constitution, which is elastic to infinitude about potential expansion of rights (as well it might be, given its inborn constraints against the propertyless, against women, and most shamefully against the descendants of African slavery) is also adamant about free speech and assembly and about the wrongness of an established faith. Thus, every great battle for the extension of liberty on this continent has had, in the last resort of the Constitution, the law on its side. And most if not all such contests have necessitated a parallel battle for the principle of free speech and assembly. Thus the struggle against slavery was in large part a struggle for the right to challenge calcified statutes about teaching and literacy (Charles Dickens wrote memorably that in many American cities it was more dangerous to teach a black man to read than it was to burn him alive). Likewise the later war over segregation took the form of a fight for free assembly and the right to demonstrate and publish. In the case of labor organizing, any drive against the open shop or the company town had to begin with a punch-up over the right to leaflet or to publish a newspaper. The same applies to the resistance to imperialist war and to the advocacy of the rights of women. The American Civil Liberties Union came into being because free speech was an inseparable aspect of all "rights" disputes. And nearer to our own time, the great challenge to imperial authority on all matters



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had its origins in something called quite simply "The Free Speech Movement."

Suddenly, though, and as if to prove that no question is ever finally decided, one finds oneself in arguments over first principles. Groups that at least affirm the rhetoric and tradition of civil rights are openly saying that free expression is not a value in itself, but a contingent and relative thing. Rather than cite a plethora of examples, I would invite readers to confirm this from their own experience, in the confidence that they will be able to do so. My own chosen instance, and the one that decided me on this, was the imposition of a "speech code" at the University of Madison in Wisconsin—a campus with a highly evolved liberal and radical tradition. The code was promulgated by an ambitious Clintonoid centrist who saw in it a means of attaching moral authority, in various academic turf wars, to the university bureaucracy. To hear the grammar of the 1960s liberation movement being bastardized in this way was a lesson that I decided not to be taught twice. And this is the importance of the Hughes book. Never mind that he balances each story of some "politically correct" atrocity with an example of bluenose McCarthyite zeal, the fact is that we need no instruction in the crimes of the old-style nativist and Prohibitionist censors. The pressing matter is the defense of free thinking from its false friends, not its traditional enemies. This is a case where what remains of the left has yet to find what remains of its voice.

As if to materialize the same point in a different way, Hilton Kramer of the *New Criterion* has done us all a favor. In a sulphurous review of Hughes in the *National Review*, entitled "Stop,Thief!" Kramer denounces Hughes for using arguments to which he is not entitled, because many of these arguments and examples originated in the *New Criterion*! This is amazingly reminiscent of the postulate made in certain correct circles that only those directly victimized have the right to pronounce on a given subject. Much of Kramer's essay is quite mad ("As we see now every day with the Clinton Administration in Washington, it is the radical Left that is calling the tune"). But there is a perverse logic at work, at least, when he writes that: "Mr. Hughes hates the Left's politicization of the art scene as much as I do, and now at last he has some very telling things to say about it. But in true liberal fashion he simply didn't have the guts to address the subject until he could safely indict the political Right as a co-conspirator." Kramer leaves the political right out of his indictment altogether, as one might expect. But let's forgive him that and pass to his claim of lonely originality in the defense of artistic integrity. In 1939, Clement Greenberg wrote a mordant essay entitled "Avant Garde and Kitsch," taking a position that derived from Trotsky's *Partisan Review* insistence that the "struggle for revolutionary ideas in art must begin again with the struggle for artistic *truth*, not in terms of any single school, but in terms of *the immutable faith of the artist in his own inner self*. Without this there is no art." So should we now say that Hilton Kramer is annexing or appropriating the line of Greenberg and Trotsky?

Perhaps one should say a brief word in defense of the PC ethos. In an oblique way, it is a compliment to pluralism in the most diverse society on earth: a recognition of the multinational society and a challenge to the hegemony of the WASP ruling class. It also contains a sort of Utopianism; a touching if authoritarian belief that behavior and expression, if properly conditioned, will actually lead to purer thoughts.

But these moralistic, idealistic constructs are in danger of metamorphosing into their opposites, if indeed they have not done so already. It is precisely because America is so "diverse" that it is mistaken to make so much of the distinctions. Freud wrote a much-too-brief essay entitled "The Narcissism of the Small Difference," which showed how people could be induced to quarrel more and more about less and less. The real tendency of PC is not to inculcate respect for the marvelous variety of humanity but to reduce each group into subgroups and finally to atoms, so that everyone is on their guard against everyone else.

Look at an innocuous example. The movement to ease the lives of the disabled was a classic instance of reformism at its most generous. How did we ever tolerate elevators without Braille panels; public buildings without access ramps? The general consciousness of the majority, respecting the existence of a large minority, was enhanced and nobody was the loser. Indeed, those of us who had to deal with strollers got a free ride as a result, with pavements and stairways made easier for all. And some thoughtless metaphors underwent reconsideration. (Because of an adored friend with chronic M.S., I myself stopped employing that *New Left Review* perennial "sclerotic" to describe petrified institutions like the British monarchy.) So far, so good. But suppose that a quadriplegic now goes to law, demanding to be allowed a job as a firefighter or on a construction site, and demanding furthermore to be referred to as "differently abled"? At once, the argument ceases to be about society and obligation.



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The first thing that happens is that the newly generous perceptions of the majority start to dry up. The second thing is that someone writes a paper saying that a specific issue of Cherokee lesbian paraplegics remains to be addressed. Out of the window goes all thought of solidarity, fraternity, and the common good.

Hughes rightly describes this aspect of PC as a species of "linguistic Lourdes," where the halt and the lame are expected to feel cured when addressed as "challenged," and where bigots are reformed by going gay-bashing instead of fag-bashing. It doesn't take long, either, for the new euphemism to become the most recent insult—which is why "queer" has gone full circle so fast. And would I have dropped "sclerotic" if I had been coerced into doing so? Thus, what begins as something ennobling becomes an aspect of those two great American delusions—the faith in therapy and the belief in litigation. Hughes quotes from a letter sent to a clever young woman student by a university department to which she had applied:

> On your recent scholarship application, members of the review committee noticed the inappropriate use of the word "chairman" . . . Of course it is especially inappropriate to address a woman as "chairman" unless she has specifically requested such a limiting language. Soon you will be entering the corporate or media sector as you begin your career . . .

The threatening and the pompous are, in this letter, the same thing. And notice the last sentence. Politically correct or "appropriate" speech has now become indispensable to businesses and bureaucracies, furnishing as it does many opportunities for authority to demonstrate control, and to pose as the arbiter of manners and codes. Pity those who imagined that they were waging a terminological war of emancipation. Not just academics and journalists and publishers, but people of all "races" and genders in all kinds of jobs, are learning the art of watching what they say, and cultivating the line of least resistance. Who knows what hidden prejudices are incubating? It may not be long, given the cyclical politics of resentment in this country, before we find out.

If a backlash does arrive, we can be sure that it will, like the Helms amendment, cloak itself in the language of victimhood. A foretaste, surely, was provided by the disgrace of the Hill-Thomas hearings, where objective deliberation was made impossible by competing claims of racism and sexism, both of them adroitly manipulated by the right. George Bush was a good little quota merchant and bean counter, as indeed Bill Clinton is turning out to be. The paltry political skill lies in doing enough bean counting to appease various sectors, while running against bean counting as such. It only takes an average machine politician a day or so to grasp this Tammany principle and to find the words with which to dignify it.

For me, there are two symbolic figures in this swirl of confusion about proper speech, "sensitive" teaching and infinite sub-categorization. The two are Lenny Bruce and Salman Rushdie. Bruce was a genuinely subversive (we might now say "transgressive") comedian, for whom the whole point of humor was that it gambled with the unsayable. As it happened, he used words that were deemed bigoted or obscene in order to demystify them. An act like his is hard to imagine today, when "comedy" oscillates between the bland, the apologetic, and the defiantly nasty.

In the case of Salman Rushdie, a genuinely multicultural figure whose work and life are a synthesis of peoples and languages and histories, it has been fascinating to hear the excuses and evasions. As soon as it could be claimed that the feelings of a great religion had been in some way "hurt," the euphemisms began to multiply. Hughes is rightly scornful of the cowardly silence of the American academy, which took refuge in half-baked talk about cultural relativism and the dangers of a Eurocentric view, not of Islam only, but of free speech as an "abstract" principle. This high-toned temporizing just chanced to dovetail nicely with the less scrupulous Western state policy of disowning Rushdie the better to resume trading arms with Iran. Those who wished to be "nonjudgmental" had in fact made a very subjective judgment, which happened to set a low value on the Enlightenment.

In the Rushdie case, also, the right abandoned its claim to be the defender of what might be called traditional values, such as free expression and opposition to theocratic tyranny. In the figure of the persecuted author, the Kramers and Podhoretzes could only see a secular, leftist ingrate. In the great contemporary test of the willingness to uphold literary and scholarly independence, they did not so much run away as actually display some sympathy for the other side.

This is why I believe that the left is missing an immense opportunity in the PC war. It has surely become clear by now that tendencies claiming descent from first principles—first principles such as



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antiracism and the equality of the sexes—have not "gone too far" but have become something else. A man like Leonard Jeffries is not an eccentric variant of a movement with which one can sympathize; he is a sworn foe of all the values and teachings upon which socialism and internationalism depend. An urgent task, as we used to say, now confronts us. The threads of a real cultural critique have been torn apart by every species of sectarian. The Me Decade has become a sort of Me Millennium, with every tribe and faction awarding primacy to its own cause. The study of history and society and literature is being atomized and turned into something arid and pointless, a mere clinic for competing resentments.

I remember feeling an uneasy premonition when, in the period of defeat and demoralization that followed the 1960s, it was decided that the left could be revived with the assertion that "the personal is political." The consequences of that rather dubious claim are now all around us, except that personality has deposed politics altogether. There is, obviously, an overdue and justified impatience with the axiomatic identification of "culture" as "Western," and with all the implied corollaries of that. But this impatience is being frittered away and demoralized by ghettoization and by the setting up of separate reservations. Take a piece of garbage like the Jeffries "lectures" on Africa in antiquity, and then take a work of real discovery like Geoffrey de Ste. Croix's book on class war in ancient Greece. We have values too, and we need to defend them against the Yahoos, against the ivory tower trimmers and against those who will exploit the politics of PC to reinforce a pseudoconsensus that is paradoxically based on divide and rule. Robert Hughes shows that there is life still in the Renaissance concept of humanist education. He reminds me, also, that, like him, I didn't come all the way to America in order to watch what I say. □

**Sven Birkerts**

## STAYING POWER

THE SIXTIES, by Edmund Wilson. Edited and with an introduction by Lewis M. Dabney. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1993. 968 pp. $35.00.

*I find that I am a man of the twenties. I still expect something exciting: drinks, animated conversation, gaiety: an uninhibited exchange of ideas. Scott Fitzgerald's idea that somewhere things were "glimmering."*

—Journal entry, 1961

With the publication of *The Sixties*, the fifth consecutive compilation of Edmund Wilson's journals, the author takes his place as one of the most thoroughly self-documented of American literary figures. This last volume, which begins in 1960 and ends with Wilson's death in 1972, runs to over nine hundred pages. One might well ask: how much is too much? And one might fairly answer, without slighting the critic or his reputation: this much is enough.

To say this is to pay Wilson a backhanded compliment. It is to acknowledge that even at his most diaristic, his most ephemeral, he repays reading. For the Wilson we encounter is not Wilson the legendary reader and critic or Wilson the novelist and would-be playwright. The journals are the housing for what is left over from the other enterprises. They are not his reading log or his critical laboratory. Rather, entries are for what would appear to be the private record: reports of daily circumstances, travels, meetings with editors and fellow writers, life with friends and family, sexual preoccupations and (though quite rare by this point) adventures.

From the start the journals were the self-accounting of a strong-minded, gregarious, erotically avaricious, and doggedly commonsensical man—a man of premodern appetites and energies. Wilson opted to present himself directly, assuming the artifice of no artifice. He was a Rousseau, a Rembrandt, insofar as he trusted that in a warts-and-all presentation the warts would not so much mar as enhance the effect of the whole. The unvarnished quality of the self-portrayal would almost suggest the diarist's lock and key, but of course Wilson knew that he was writing for readers. The project must therefore be viewed as an artist's deliberate effort to fashion a public portrait of his non-public self. A problematic endeavor, but the author is so set on candor and so little given to preening that he more or less succeeds.

The Wilson that emerges from *The Sixties*—he is sixty-five in 1960—is very recognizably the Wilson of the earlier decades, only under the aspect of diminution. There is, especially in the first years, an essential continuity; the onset of retirement age does not bring any sudden transformations. The man still drinks his way through a lake of booze every day (though now he notes the effects more, makes the occasional vow about tapering off). Though he is somewhat less priapic—and less able to consummate at will—some of the old spirit remains. "Last summer, alone here all summer," he writes in an early entry, "I felt, when I had an erection, what a



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pity it was that so splendid a thing should not have a chance to enjoy itself." And he is still actively in contact with many of the leading thinkers and writers of the day: Robert Lowell, Isaiah Berlin, W.H. Auden, Lillian Hellman, Arthur Schlesinger, to name just a few.

Wilson is also still a fairly energetic traveler, making his way to Quebec, Hungary, Jamaica, Israel, and Europe (his reports, sadly, tend to focus mostly on who he socialized with); a solicitous neighbor (mostly in Talcottville, in upstate New York, where he often stayed alone in the family manse); and a caring if preoccupied husband and father. But as we read on we see that the great arc has passed through its meridian and has begun to falter. Wilson's body starts to give out on him—there are heart attacks, bouts of angina, gout, and grievous dental woes. Wilson notes the collapses and indignities without flinching (remarking on impotence and incontinence into the bargain), but then, remarkably, he gathers his energies and his cheer and soldiers on—drinking, reading, and socializing at a pace that would flatten the hardiest debutante.

Paging across the whole shelf of Wilson's journals one is struck by the core steadiness of the man, a quality nowhere more manifest than in his prose. The style may change slightly over the years—the younger Wilson was more prone to the literary turn of phrase—but the voice is basically the same. Straightforward, incisive, ever alert to physical nuance.

*From* The Twenties *(on Edna St. Vincent Millay):*

> **Edna.** *She seemed well and normal again, almost robust—no make-up, a dreary white-flecked gray dress, which, however, she insisted had come from a very expensive and good place. Her hands and feet and ankles were so much larger than they used to be that I could hardly believe they were the same ones I had loved. Nor did her throat seem so beautiful—I think her putting on flesh had spoiled its contour—and her mouth, which seemed thicker than it used to, revealed two big square front teeth.*

From 1969 (on Svetlana Alliluyevna):

> *She is over 40 but does not look her age. She is very pretty and with her character and brains must have had men after her all her life. Her appearances on TV and in photographs give a misleading impression of her because they make her look much bigger and more substantial than she is. She is small, with nice soft brown hair, rather large brown eyes of a peculiar pale color of green, a somewhat elongated and pointed bird-like nose and a small mouth. She has small hands and feet.*

Though four decades have passed, the seeing eye has not so much as blinked. Both descriptions confirm a writer rooted deeply in the here and now, a writer who cannot resist making and publicizing discriminations, no matter what the subject.

Still, *The Sixties* is a journal, and it exhibits over long stretches the uninflected ordinariness of self-reportage. The prose, so much of it devoted to a patient accounting of arrangements made and people met, is of interest less on its own merits and more because it marks the trail of the man who was Edmund Wilson. Of course, writer and contents cannot be neatly separated. The entries are also implicitly about the life that attended his eminence. Wilson drinking too much with W.H. Auden is more interesting to read about than John Doe having a few with John Q. Public. We get a lift from imagining famous people having uninhibited exchanges. Alas, Wilson seldom gratifies our curiosity. We hardly ever learn what the talk was about, much less who said what to whom.

To be sure, there are some diverting and readable set-pieces in the volume: Wilson joining a roster of famous writers for a dinner at the Kennedy White House ("Kennedy told me he has seen a review of *Patriotic Gore* and asked why I had called it that. He asked what conclusions I had come to about the Civil War. I answered that I couldn't very well tell him then and there and referred him to the Introduction."); Wilson observing at close hand the Mike Nichols/Elaine May romance; Wilson carrying on a late-game flirtation with the wife of his Talcottville dentist ("She liked the way I 'touched' her but wasn't in love with me—sex may not be real love. I invited her to do fellatio, but she said, 'I'm a lady.' "). But these are not by themselves quite reason enough to purchase the book or invest the quantities of time needed to work through it. Indeed, if anything they whet our appetite for all of the things we wish to hear about but don't.

There is little, almost no, mention of Wilson's prodigious reading (a few remarks on Balzac, Macaulay . . .). Nothing, really, about his ongoing intellectual activities. Nothing about his labors at the desk, even though Wilson passed this last decade, like the others before it, in a state of high productivity, writing a memoir, *Upstate, The Dead Sea Scrolls* (there are a few entries on his discussions with scholars), as well as a stream of substantial essays for the *New Yorker*. The social



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and political life of the times (assassinations, riots, the bourgeoning counterculture) is a smudge in the background. All of which does get us wondering: how could the man so effectively banish his reading and thinking self from his ongoing project of transcribing his life? Did he hold to some private conviction about the separation of art and life, or did he believe that he had some writerly obligation to render the facets of his experience that his literary obsessions bypassed?

But one does not turn the *The Sixties* for intellectual stimulation or to seize an unexpected angle on the history of the times. The reader who engages the book will do so because of a devotion to Wilson and to everything he represented in our literary culture. This reader will surely not fail to be moved by the evidence of unglamorous private struggles and the equally private victories achieved. The journals reveal just how a great sensibility, a Johnsonian sensibility, faced up to infirmity, bodily outrage, and death. For all the pages given over to the inventory of dissolution, Wilson can be seen to triumph. Triumph, that is, in the only way that any mortal finally can—through attitude, through self-mastery. Here is the man on his 74th birthday:

> *I spent the day in sloth and doldrums. Champagne at lunch—Svetlana insisted on making the cork pop to the ceiling. My not being able to make love, not being able to swim or take much exercise and now, with my lower teeth gone, not being able to eat anything but the softest food is getting me down and making me feel frustrated. Had some drinks and went to sleep very early, but had bad dreams and woke up feeling horrible. . . . But read Macaulay and somewhat regained my equanimity and my inspiration to live.*

It is heartening—truly—to see how a cultivated mind can serve as a bulwark against despair. Wilson's served him thus all the way to the end.

The reader can only be amazed at Wilson's elasticity of spirit, his ever-renewed ability to discover some grounds of incentive after each new bodily betrayal. There is surprise, too, at how little he reflects in these pages on the approach of death. And in the rare instances when he does, the thoughts are basic, resolutely nonmetaphysical:

> *December 12, 1971, Wellfleet: When I look back I feel quite definitely divided from my earlier self, who cared about things in a way I no longer do. All that comedy and conflict of human activity—one gets to feel cut off from all that. One cannot even imagine anymore the time when one had once participated. One ought perhaps to have died before reaching this point, when one still had the illusion of participating. All that energy expended to peter out!*

The third person pronoun, the awkward diction—Wilson is clearly not comfortable with this sort of speculation. It is almost as if he were surprised at old age, the fact of it, as if it were something he had not thought about before. All along he has trusted in his body, in his capacity for robust give-and-take, and now, suddenly, the rules of the game have been changed. No Rilke, this man. Yet this incredulity is also the source of his tremendous staying power. He keeps coming back from his falls, not only because he is proud and determined, not only because he knows nothing else to do, but also because in his long life he has never caught the bacillus of what might be called existential despair. Reading Wilson, we hearken to a particular kind of spirit, and we learn about its limits and its strengths. In his attitude toward illness and death we discern something of the prodigy who wrote so much and so well because he refused to be mystified by literature.

But there is another recognition that attends our reading of the journals. Simply, we cannot avoid seeing how much has changed in our culture even since the time of his death. Behind the sketchiest of annotations we can glimpse an intellectual and literary society far more vigorous than anything we have today. Wilson himself was its cynosure. Indeed, he manifested the same unblinking faith in the life of that culture as he did in the fundamental durability of his body. His believing may have helped to make it so. An entry for 1962, plucked almost at random (for there are many, many such entries) runs:

> *I couldn't rush around as much as I usually do, had continually to put on the brakes: two evenings with the Lowells, two with Mike Nichols, two with the Epsteins, two evenings at The Little Players . . . the Jonathan Millers at the Epsteins and The Little Players . . . Auden . . . Muriel [Spark] and Ved Mehta, luncheon with William Shawn, luncheon with Dawn [Powell], Renata [Adler], Brett-Smith, Roger Straus, Leon Edel (some of these overlapping—I made them come to the Algonquin, when possible).*

This is not the place to argue the causes of the dissolution of that literary life, only to remark sadly upon its passing. And to remark on the feeling one



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has on finishing, after reading the final entry, a sad, whimsical little verse to Elena—the feeling that the last truly solid bridge between higher culture and common culture has collapsed, that we are all stranded on one side or the other of what seems to be a widening chasm. □

## TAMAR JACOBY

## DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS

LURE AND LOATHING: ESSAYS ON RACE, IDENTITY, AND THE AMBIVALENCE OF ASSIMILATION, Gerald Early, editor. Allen Lane, the Penguin Press, 1993. 351 pp., $23.50.

Most white Americans know about the scorn many ghetto youths feel for "acting white"—for studying, for doing well in school, for playing by white rules and meeting the white man's standards. Most assume it is a passing phase, curable, they assume, by better teachers and brighter prospects. The twenty essays by black intellectuals collected in *Lure and Loathing* will disabuse white readers of that hopeful assumption. Distinguished academics, top-flight poets, the grand old men and women of black letters, liberal and conservative: all the essayists attest to a deep ambivalence about white America and the choices they have made to attain success by mainstream standards. As *Lure and Loathing* makes clear, profound doubts about "acting white" are part of being black in America today. No issue could raise graver questions for race relations.

It is no accident that these concerns are coming to the surface now. Integration and the rise of the black middle class (it has roughly quadrupled in three decades) are putting more and more blacks at risk for what has been called "assimilation blues." But in fact, as this volume shows, blacks have always had mixed feelings about making it in white America. Gerald Early, a professor at Washington University in St. Louis, traces the ambivalence back a century to a famous passage by W.E.B. Du Bois about what he called the black man's "double-consciousness." The essays in *Lure and Loathing* all take off from this classic paragraph, and each makes plain its basic sympathy for Du Bois's uneasy feelings about his identity. "No Negro," Early's introduction states, "who has given earnest thought to the situation of his people in America has failed, at some time in life, to find himself at these crossroads, has failed to ask himself at some time: what, after all, am I? Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both? Or is it my duty to cease to be a Negro as soon as possible and be an American?"

This sounds like a standard immigrants' question, but as all twenty essays here make clear, the issue has a special edge for black Americans. It shouldn't be too hard to understand why: after nearly four hundred years of white domination, white standards and white values naturally look suspect to many black people. Poet Anthony Walton makes the point sharply in his essay: "In the light of the foregoing"—a restrained but powerful description of past and present prejudice—"one can doubt in sincerity whether or not it is possible for a black person to be American."

As stunning as the depth of the alienation in these pages is the way it crosses ideological lines, nagging at so-called "conservative" blacks as insistently as it fires militants. People expect men like Molefi Kete Asante, founding father of Afrocentrist scholarship, to proclaim angrily, "I have always known that my heritage was not the same as that of whites." But what are we to think when a prominent neoconservative like Glenn Loury describes his discomfort with his son's interest in ice hockey? "As we all know," Loury writes, "hockey . . . is a white man's game."

There are, certainly, differences among the writers in the volume, differences that will have critical consequences for race relations. The twenty essayists divide roughly into two camps. The labels are misleading: liberal and conservative, the "lured" and the "loathers," even integrationist and separatist are too reductive. The divide is not between those who feel black and those who feel American. The difference between Loury and Asante, between Stanley Crouch and Nikki Giovanni has to do more with the way the two sides handle their common ambivalence. Can they stand to live with their double consciousness—with their blackness *and* their American citizenship? Or do they feel they have to choose, trumping one allegiance with the other?

About half the essays represent the conventional wisdom on race issues that prevails in the black community and among liberals: that white America is irredeemably racist, that blackness is an all-encompassing identity, that black alienation is healthy and all self-esteem is based in racial or ethnic awareness. The outlook is familiar enough; what is striking is how thin the argument seems here, even in the hands of its best proponents. Bitter, slashing, dogmatic, this camp is driven by a need for



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a stark either/or. Several writers admit candidly how threatening they found their inherited double consciousness: it made them feel "sick" and "schizoid," "inauthentic" and "off-center." And so they chose for Africa—and boosterism—at the expense of all else and all subtlety. Not surprisingly, their prose is often airless, filled with cant and borrowed dogma. More than anything, they remind one of old communists, clinging to the certainties of their faith rather than face a complex reality. Their arguments are aggressive, but in the end most of them seem trapped, and their views would be hard to take seriously if they weren't so influential: the theoretical underpinnings of so much contemporary black culture and education.

Not all the writers in the other camp would call themselves conservative, although simply by questioning orthodox views they risk incurring that label—even more scorned in the black community than it is among many whites. Perhaps not coincidentally, this camp boasts the better writers—indeed, some of the best essayists in the business. Whatever one thinks of his views, Loury's contribution is a towering statement about personal freedom and group identity. Former *Village Voice* writer Stanley Crouch, poet Anthony Walton, Yale law professor Stephen Carter, and novelist Reginald McKnight also rise here to the highest standards of the essay form.

Not all agree in all particulars, but they share a common reluctance to take refuge in an easy either/or worldview—whether the racial chauvinism of black orthodoxy or a contrasting denial of racial identity. Together, this second group of essays gives the lie to the stereotype of the black conservative, so often derided, including in this volume, as inauthentic and self-hating, disloyal to the race and to his or her own past. None of the dissenting writers here choose to be American at the cost of abandoning their blackness. None have forgotten the suffering of their people. None have entirely put aside their fears or anger at white America. This is the great strength of their writing; it is what makes this volume so powerful. Still, it cannot make for easy lives—or for an easy answer to the nation's race question.

Ironically, then, though the volume is a showcase for black "dissenters," in the end the reader is brought back to what the two camps have in common: the lingering estrangement of all blacks, no matter how hopeful or forgiving. Yes, the two camps differ in their views of how much has changed in recent decades. The angriest see no improvement—nothing but a little tokenism—and assume as an article of faith that whites are incurably racist. The more hopeful group believes that we have already seen a sea change, that blacks must recognize this and begin to take responsibility for what's wrong in their lives. Yet as even the dissenters make clear, it will be generations before we can expect to see the kind of trust that is necessary for real racial harmony. You don't have to be paranoid to feel that the civil-rights revolution is too recent to count on: that thirty years of relative good will is nothing next to four centuries of oppression. Not even the most optimistic, integrationist blacks can—or want to—forget the horrors of history. Much as they argue for moving beyond blame, they too are still choking on humiliation—and struggling with an anger they cannot quite put behind them.

On the question of racial loyalty, too, what is striking is how similar the two groups are—though one camp sees only good in solidarity, while the other knows it comes at a cost. In this as on many issues, Molefi Kete Asante's view is among the starkest: as a black man in America, he says, you either "identify with the 'masters' [or] with the 'slaves.' " This sounds reasonable enough, but for Asante and others, it rules out integration. It is also the logic behind the disastrous choice not to "act white": given the "masters' " hold on schools and jobs, for many blacks, mainstream success means betrayal of one's brothers and sisters.

*Lure and Loathing* is filled with wrenching personal descriptions of this downward tug. Essay after essay tells of the difficult time the contributor had as a child, enduring the taunts of peers who felt that the writer was giving himself airs. Reginald McKnight recalls being beaten up because of the way he spoke and walked—just a little too rigidly. "He think he white," one of his attackers said to another. "Yeah, he think he something." As successful a professional as Stephen Carter, the youngest man to make professor at Yale Law School, has to say explicitly (whether to himself or his black readers hardly matters): "[H]ard work . . . is not white, male, and Eurocentric." Even Glenn Loury, strong-willed and independent as he is, reports how close he came to losing his battle with the undertow of the racial "loyalty test":

> I now understand how this desire to be regarded as genuinely black, to be seen as a "regular brother," has dramatically altered my life. It narrowed the range of my earliest intellectual pursuits, distorted my relationships with other people, censored my political thought and expres-



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> sion, informed the way I dressed and spoke, and shaped my cultural interests. . . .[I]n my experience the need to be affirmed by one's racial peers can take on a pathological dimension.

Irrational and self-defeating as this syndrome seems, it is not something white Americans can argue with—or do much about. The essays in *Lure and Loathing* offer a rare window on black experience, explaining a good deal that is otherwise bewildering to white people. But in the end, the white reader can only look on ruefully, cheering from a distance for the poignant struggles of these and other blacks determined to grapple with the demons they've inherited.

Can the dissenters make a difference? Can they carve a path, for themselves and others, around the impossible choice between being black and being American? Most are struggling to do just that—struggling to define a black identity that allows some personal freedom. In contrast to the orthodox, who feel their racial identity is monolithic and all-determining, dissenters wonder aloud exactly what it consists in. For many, the search is plainly uncomfortable. "Yes, we are black . . ." Stephen Carter writes, "but *how* are we black?"

Still, even writers like Carter and Loury believe that black is more than a skin color—and they too cling, however unsurely, to a separate perspective on America. Dissenters and orthodox alike agree on one thing: what blacks have in common is their history of suffering. It is a history that can cut two ways: can lead to paranoia and avoiding responsibility for one's own life—or, in the best of circumstances, to moral insight.

Several of the dissenters in this volume wonder if they don't take the American dream more seriously than many whites do. As fiction writer James McPherson notes, "It has always been black Americans who call attention to the distance between asserted ideals and daily practices." At its best, these writers suggest, the black identity is to be a voice of conscience in America.

The pitfalls of that role are obvious enough, here perfectly captured by Loury. "I am so much more," he writes, "than the one wronged, misunderstood, underestimated, derided or ignored by whites. I am more than the one who has struggled against this oppresson and indifference." But at the end of *Lure and Loathing*, a reader comes away feeling that its best writers do have something to teach all Americans, black and white. Candid at all costs, probing, willing to be wrong, mindful of the past but intent on freeing themselves from self-imposed blinders and shackles, they hold up a moral way of thinking with applications well beyond racial issues. At the end of his essay, Loury shakes himself and wonders how he could have dreamed of stopping his son from learning a new sport—whether or not it fell within Loury's own horizons. Chagrined but in a way hopeful, he watches the boy watch a group of white hockey players and contemplates a future he knows he can't even imagine. □


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**Bogdan Denitch**

## BALKAN TRAGEDY

Books about the breakup of Yugoslavia and the genocidal war against the Moslem Slavs of Bosnia have become a minor industry. As expected, journalists are at the forefront and social scientists



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and historians lag far behind. More often than not, the academics have issued updated versions of studies that were carried out some years ago and can only be made relevant to the current situation with considerable strain. The journalists' books have been produced in a hurry, and it shows.

What is astonishing is how little useful material was written by social and political scientists in the years immediately preceding the catastrophe. Yugoslavia was easily the most accessible of all the countries in Eastern Europe. It was open both to journalists and social scientists. The latter could have easily found numerous native colleagues in all the major university centers. Extensive local field and opinion surveys had been carried out since the mid-sixties. Yet social scientists contributed very little to help us understand why a successful experiment in managing a multi-ethnic state collapsed with such bloody results.

The reason for the dearth of relevant social research was simple: two decades of systematic cutbacks on research funds for social science. These cutbacks were worst of all for studies of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. This was naturally accompanied by a continuous drop in the number of graduate students entering this area; departments of Slavic and Russian studies atrophied as young scholars fled what was turning into a desert. Even the intelligence community paid ever less attention to Yugoslavia, although the CIA proved to be right in 1989 when it predicted that there was high probability of an explosive breakdown.

**Books Discussed in This Essay**

*Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History,* Robert Kaplan. St. Martin's Press, 1993. 352 pp. $22.95.

*The Destruction of Yugoslavia: Tracking the Break-Up, 1980–92,* Branka Magas. Verso, 1993. 366 pp. $22.95 paper.

*The Fall of Yugoslavia: The Third Balkan War,* Misha Glenny. Penguin Books, 1992. 194 pp. $10.00 paper.

*A Paper House: The Ending of Yugoslavia,* Mark Thompson. Pantheon Books, 1993. 350 pp. $23.00.

*The Tragedy of Yugoslavia,* James Seroka and Vukasin Pavlovic (eds). M.E. Sharpe, 1992. 219 pp. $39.95.

*War Crimes in Bosnia-Hercegovina.* Vols 1 and 2, Helsinki Watch, 1992 and 1993. 368 pp. and 440 pp. $20.00 each.

We are now paying the price for some of that reckless cost cutting. It is clear that both the UN negotiators and Washington policy planners had no experts available or that their experts had done their research a generation ago. Even the newspapers and news agencies abandoned Belgrade in the eighties. Most of the reportage in the *New York Times* until the recent flurry of interest was written by a (to be sure, excellent) stringer, Chuck Sudetic. This reflected two things: the general cutback in reporters stationed abroad over the past two decades, and the drop of interest in Yugoslavia since the middle seventies. Yugoslavia was no longer "in." It was no longer an interesting experiment; nothing terribly exciting seemed to be happening. In part this was a delayed reaction to Tito's crackdown on the Croatian Spring and on liberals in Belgrade and Ljubljana in the early seventies. Yugoslavia was the most open society in Eastern Europe but it also had more political dissidents in jail than any other country in the area. In part Yugoslavia stopped being unique as a relatively open society for a communist-ruled state when Hungary and later Poland liberalized. Yugoslav workers' self-management within a market economy did not interest a West and United States that were going through a period of dogmatic insistence that markets could only be coupled with private ownership and that democratizing the workplace was a utopian illusion.

A brief flicker of interest in Yugoslavia revived when Tito died in 1980, with the inevitable question: what would happen now? In the mid-eighties more attention was focused on the country during the ever more brutal repression of the Albanian majority in Kosovo under the Serbian leadership of Slobodan Milosevic. As things stand, one of the best of the books under review is *The Yugoslav Tragedy,* edited by James Seroka and Vukasin Pavlovic. It is somewhat dated but represents an invaluable collection by younger scholars from all parts of former Yugoslavia on the verge of its destruction. The book's bias is liberal, democratic and pro-Yugoslav. It is written by people who were arguably the best social and political scientists in the country. It provides a good understanding for what followed.

Branka Magas's *The Destruction of Yugoslavia* is a frustrating book. It is well informed and well written, but it has too little continuity. However, the book will remain indispensable for those who need to know the details of the internal struggles in the Yugoslav League of Communists that led to Milosevic's de facto coup against the federal "Titoist" Constitution of 1974. It is solid in its coverage of the Serbian repression in Kosovo, an autonomous province with



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an Albanian majority where the disintegrative processes began. It is much weaker in its handling of Croat nationalism, which it treats as essentially defensive, and pays little attention to the self-satisfied localist egoism of the Slovenes, which contributed to the violence of the breakdown. For a declared Marxist internationalist, she is much too sympathetic to her own national group, the Croats, but I agree that the main responsibility for the Yugoslavian tragedy lies with the Serbian regime and the Yugoslav army. The kind of Yugoslavia they wanted could not be saved. It would have required the repression of all other national groups, which had developed strong local loyalties underpinned by the fact that all the republics except Bosnia were national homes of a Yugoslav nation.

Mark Thompson's book *The Paper House* is well written and based on extensive travel in Yugoslavia, mostly in Slovenia. He is the London correspondent of the iconoclastic Slovenian review *Mladina* and reflects the viewpoint of that journal and of trendy young intellectuals in Slovenia. Thus he has a post-modernist approach to the collapse of Yugoslavia, emphasizing the politics of identity, both ethnic and generational, as a major factor. One could almost believe that Slovenian rock and punk music caused Yugoslavia's breakup. I am old fashioned enough to believe that the echo effect of the collapse of communist rule in the entire region, increasing economic difficulties given prolonged European economic stagnation, the death of Tito and the rise of aggressive Serbian nationalism all had more to do with the breakup of Yugoslavia than anything that happened in Slovenia. Nevertheless, the Thompson book is worth reading for the Slovenian angle on the events and for fascinating sketches of scenes in Croatia and Bosnia.

Robert E. Kaplan's *Balkan Ghosts* tries to do too much. Unfortunately it is influenced by the literature on "mentalities," which supposedly produce unchangeable exotic cultures, such as those of the Balkans. He is fascinated by exotica; thus the book is a variant of the literature denounced by Edward Said in *Orientalism*. The Yugoslav chapters are thin and too influenced by Rebecca West's magnificent and flawed *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, a huge mythopoetic excursion into the history of the region. West's book is excessively pro-Serbian: she saw them much as they saw themselves, as the guardians of the West from the barbaric Ottoman Turks; as martyrs who had sacrificed their magnificent medieval civilization to defend an ungrateful West. That myth is only half as deadly as the more contemporary one, equally popular in Serbia today, that the Serbs are all that stands in the way of an imperial Germany's inexorable march to the east. The first myth leads to the notion that murdering Bosnian Slav civilians is a just retribution for centuries of suffering under the Turkish yoke; the second, to the belief that the European Community must be defied since it is under the pernicious influence of the Germans and Austrians and therefore wants the destruction of the Serbs. Kaplan treats political cultures as essentially unchanging and provides a justification for all those who believe the myth that these peoples have been killing each other for centuries, that it is in their very nature. In prosaic fact there had never been war between the Serbs and Croats except under Nazi and fascist occupation during the Second World War. Bosnian Moslems had supported both Yugoslavian states as the best solution for their community and have a high rate of intermarriage with both Serbs and Croats.

The most balanced of the journalistic accounts is Misha Glenny's *The Fall of Yugoslavia*. It is a book I would recommend for any courses in the area. Glenny shows an awareness of the complexity of the background and the fact that there are many victims and few heroes in this story. While he understands that the major responsibility is that of the Milosevic regime in Belgrade and its proteges in Croatian Kraina and Bosnia, he also shows that the Croat regime is no innocent victim but a lusty participant in the carnage and partition of Bosnia. Glenny's book is indispensable; he knows his area in depth and has paid more attention to history than most social scientists.

Lastly, as upsetting and badly written as it is, the Helsinki Watch report is a must for all who want to think seriously about the area. The two reports provide numbing details of atrocities, in town after town; they cite endless witnesses and convince by the sheer weight of facts. Clearly all sides are committing atrocities, and equally clearly the lion's share has been committed by the Serbian nationalists. Just as the American Indians undoubtedly committed horrible atrocities against white settlers, so did the poorly armed Bosnian Moslem forces (usually months after their homes were destroyed and families massacred) against the Serbs, themselves often innocent civilians. Without getting a feel for the barbarism that has resulted from the breakdown of an admittedly repressive multi-ethnic state, one cannot think intelligently about the rise of populist nationalism throughout the area and in much of the world. This problem will be with us for a long time to come. □



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Nadia Urbinati

# THE ART OF TOLERANCE

MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK: CIVIC TRADITIONS IN MODERN ITALY, by Robert D. Putnam. Princeton University Press, 1993. 258 pp. $24.95.

Why do some democratic governments fail or work badly, whereas others have at least qualified success? What are the conditions that allow representative institutions to perform well? For Robert Putnam, recent experience in Italy provides useful material for answers to these questions. Scholars can find in Italy widely varied social and cultural conditions: from the backwardness of preindustrial societies to the complexity of postindustrial ones; from deeply religious communities to thoroughly secularized ones. Putnam studied the implementation of local and regional political decentralization from its beginnings in 1970 until the end of the 1980s. Twenty years of data allow the author to check the growth of one democratic seed in many different soils.

Using the "Italian case," Putnam confronts a major question facing political scientists: do political institutions shape social reality or does social reality shape political institutions? He declares his own preference for the second view, suggesting that historical context (socio-cultural-political) is decisive in determining the performance of democratic institutions.

The achievement of the book, however, is not merely to demonstrate that context matters, but to describe what *features* of the context make democratic institutions perform well. His theoretical perspective is similar to that adopted by Alexis de Tocqueville in his more celebrated journey to America. Similar also is this conclusion: democracy is robust where civic values are widely shared by ordinary people and expressed through a rich tradition of active and passionate citizen participation.

Putnam's thesis is important for at least two reasons. First, it represents a critique of "libertarian" liberalism, which claims that civic values are incompatible with liberal-democratic institutions, which are necessarily based on individualism. On the contrary, writes Putnam, a society inhabited by individuals who do *not* attend to public life, who consider politics an obstacle to the pursuit of their private interests, faces a progressive deterioration of its democratic institutions.

The libertarians' argument pivots on the claim that civic and participatory values promote a highly anti-individualistic and intolerant society. But Putnam can demonstrate empirically that civic spirit does not entail an antiliberal attitude and, above all, that a democracy needs this spirit if it is to survive. The inhabitants of Emilia-Romagna's or Umbria's cities, where decentralization worked, are neither communitarian saints nor perfect citizens; nor are they intolerant. On the contrary, they have a lively sense of individuality—which they express, in part, precisely through participating in public life. They love political disputes and, for this reason, they appreciate and look for differences of opinion as much as for consensus; they practice the art of tolerance. Associationism is based on reciprocity and cooperation, but also on dissent, conflict, and renewed search for consensus. Their numerous cooperatives and neighborhood associations are a permanent school of democracy.

The second reason why this book is important is its counter-proof: local democracy has not worked well in southern Italy, which did not have a history of free republics, or in those parts of northern Italy where large industrial corporations have reproduced the very "evils" that the south inherited from its history of political despotism: fragmentation of civil society, atomistic individualism, hierarchy, and corruption. What is missing in both cases is a spirit of cooperation. Thus, writes Putnam, economic development alone is not enough to make a good democracy—nor is it true that where civic spirit is lively, the economy is backward or lacks competition: the region of Emilia-Romagna is characterized by one of the most advanced economies in the world.

Why, Putnam asks, are the citizens of Emilia-Romagna and Umbria more satisfied with their local and regional governments than the citizens of Campania and Calabria? Why do the former regions have many more public services and why do those services work better? Financial resources do not explain this difference: the Italian central government distributes more money to the latter regions (because they are poorer) than to the former ones. Yet the former are able to translate those lesser resources into more and better services.

If the answer cannot be found in the present, the past can help. Through a succinct historical survey, Putnam demonstrates that the origin of "civic-ness"



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lies in the remote history of the free cities of the Middle Ages. The strength of civic associationism has always found a way to resurface: it came back to life, for instance, in the nineteenth century through land labor day guilds, trade unions, mutual associations, and cooperatives. Socialist ideals and left politics (particularly rooted in Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany and Umbria) did not in these cases create good government; they stimulated a spirit that was never completely lost. The map of contemporary democratic success is virtually identical to the map of Renaissance republicanism.

Putnam's book will certainly encounter criticism, above all in Italy. His conclusion would seem to be that where a tradition of civic virtue is absent, one cannot have good institutions. But this allows too little space for human will and, above all, for political action. If a region did not have such and such a historical experience, is it forever barred from enjoying democratic life?

In spite of this theoretical problem, Putnam's book shouldn't be thought to invite resignation. Indeed, isn't it true that, since the last century and even before, Italian intellectuals, whether radical or conservative, liberal or socialist, have always sought to promote a moral and civil improvement of their fellows? For all these writers the urgent question has been that of encouraging political and moral autonomy through "civic education."

The history of free republics in the Middle Ages may help us to understand public life in some Italian regions, but it is not a sufficient explanation for the crisis of legitimacy of democratic institutions in Italy. To understand that, one must go back to a more recent past: to the way in which the political unification of the country took place in the last century; to the authoritarian and paternalistic politics of the liberal governments, especially in the south; to decades of ironclad centralism and statism.

One should finally add the fact that the young Italian democracy (which was born only after the Second World War), experienced almost half a century of one-party government as the consequence of cold-war politics. In Italy the golden rule of democracy—to govern and be governed in turn—never worked.

A defender of Putnam's thesis about the weight of the past might object that those factors did not prevent the "civic" regions from using the representative institutions of democracy well. But they did perhaps prevent the evolution of "civic-ness" in those regions where republican tradition had not taken root.

Historical reconstruction helps us to explain many present events, but history does not control us: we remain sufficiently free to determine the direction of things through our will and projects. Only because of this can we speak of renaissance and restoration, decadence and rebirth.

It is a fact that the weakness of democratic institutions manifests itself as a weakening of civic spirit, the transformation of politics into a mere instrument of group or "family" interests. The moral earthquake that has hit Italian political life during the last year is evidence of this. Nevertheless, the evolution of contemporary political life in Italy may yet challenge Putnam's argument. Even in the "uncivic" regions, civil society is showing its will to change the rules that have dominated public life during the last decades. For the first time in their history, the citizens of southern Italy have broken the wall of *omertà* (the Mafia's code of silence) and organized movements of protest against a corrupt political regime. They are asking for a deep political renovation.

Reading Putnam's book produces a peculiar effect, because it gives us sufficient evidence to reach a conclusion that is, in some ways, opposed to its own. The reform of political parties and democratic institutions is necessary precisely to cultivate, or stimulate the birth of, the fundamental element of what Tocqueville called the spirit of democracy: the tendency to concern oneself with the public good, to practice the arts of self-government, political control, and social criticism through the associations that constitute civil society, the core of democratic life. □



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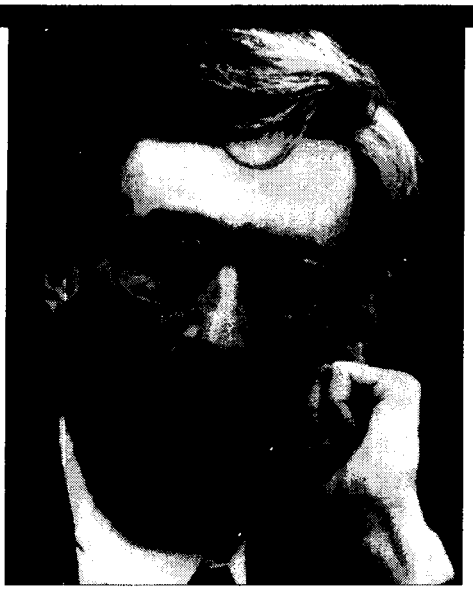

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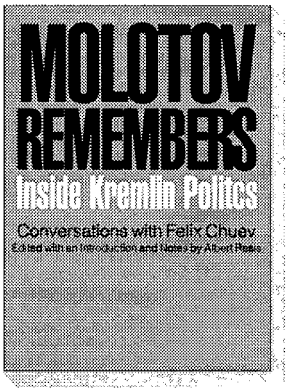


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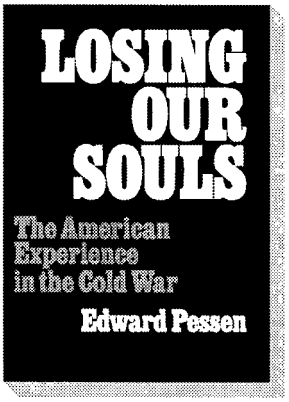


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